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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help school communities make good choices about early literacy intervention. The guide distinguishes between "reading" (a process of learning to decode and comprehend texts) and a broader concept of "literacy" that includes understanding of the value of language and reading (emergent literacy), the ability to write making proper use of the English language (composition), and the ability to read for understanding across topics (critical literacy). Part I provides an overview of different types of research-based reading reforms, focusing on the ways their designs relate to the general body of theory and research on early reading and literacy. It describes a diverse array of research-based approaches to intervention to improve early reading and literacy. Part I also provides a framework for assessing early interventions and uses the framework to provide a summative review of six different types of interventions: Pre-kindergarten, Kindergarten, Pullout, Classroom-wide, School-wide, and Inquiry-based. Part II provides guidance for assessing the learning environment that can set the stage for planning for early interventions. It considers: assessing current practice, setting a new direction, designing an intervention, and assessing impact. Each section contains contact information and references on early reading/literacy intervention and about different intervention methods. An appendix contains a sample early reading and literacy classroom survey. (Contains 53 references and 15 figures.) (NKA)

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Critical Literacy

Reading Recovery

Decoding

Phonics

Even Start

tervention

Emergent Literacy

Composition

Four Blocks

Whole Language

Comprehension

Improving Early Reading and Literacy

A Guide for Developing Research-Based Programs

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Improving Early Reading and Literacy

A Guide for Developing Research-Based Programs

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Book design and production by Jeffrey Bardzell

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Introduction

Making good choices about how to improve early reading and literacy represents a major challenge for many elementary schools. There are many intervention strategies to choose from, as well as divergent theories of early reading and literacy acquisition. There are also new opportunities to secure funding for interventions, through state and federal programs. For example, in Indiana, the Indiana Department of Education initiated the Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program in 1997 to provide schools an opportunity to develop new approaches to reading and literacy. More recently, the federal Reading Excellence Act provides opportunities for states to develop research-based reform initiatives in early reading and literacy.[1] There are also state and federally initiated reforms, such as the Comprehensive School Restructuring Demonstration Project, that encourage school-wide restructuring that encompasses reading and literacy.

These new reforms have a major commonality: they encourage educators to undertake initiatives that have a research base. Most of the early reading and literacy interventions that appear on the "approved lists" of funding agencies have designs that are consonant with the research. Indeed, most reading methods are based on the interventionists' understanding of the research literature. Many of these reform advocates developed coherent approaches to early literacy intervention and restructuring that reflect a cohesive understanding of the research. A few of these programs also have a confirmatory research base that indicates that if they are implemented, they have a high probability of improving learning outcomes.

The idea that funding agencies may have approved lists of reading and literacy reforms that they will fund may be a mixed blessing. If the reforms that schools choose fit with

[1] In this *Guide* we use "reading" to describe the process of learning to read texts, a process that involves decoding and comprehension. We use the term "literacy" as a broader concept that includes reading, but also includes emergent literacy (including concepts about print and genres, oral language development, etc.), composition (the ability to write, making proper use of the English language), and critical literacy (understanding the meaning of texts in their contexts, ability to reflect on readings and respond to them as individuals).

their cultures, their embedded philosophies of education, and the learning needs of their students, then there is a good chance that the selected programs will improve early reading and literacy. However, if methods are selected that are not consonant with the values and experiences of teachers, then they may ignore or resist the reform, substantially reducing the chances that the learning environment will improve. Similarly, other "misfits" between what programs provide and what students need can limit the success of any program. Thus, the choices schools make about early literacy improvement are critical.

This *Guide* is designed to help school communities make good choices about early literacy interventions. Part I provides an overview of different types of research-based reading reforms, focusing on the ways their designs relate to the general body of theory and research on early reading and literacy. It describes a diverse array of research-based approaches to intervention to improve early reading and literacy. Further, the *Guide* distinguishes between *reading* (a process of learning to decode and comprehend texts) and a broader concept of *literacy* that includes understanding of the value of language and reading (emergent literacy), the ability to write making proper use of the English language (composition), and the ability to read for understanding across topics (critical literacy). As an introduction, we explore why the systematic study of the research base can inform educators who are interested in developing a research-based intervention and how an understanding of the research base can inform current practice or the decision to initiate an intervention.

Why Study the Research Base?

Many people reading this text may wonder why reviewing the research on reading and literacy interventions might help them make good choices. They may think, "I learned to read, so others can do it." However, the process of learning to read is exceedingly complex. It took humans more than a million years to progress from near-universal ability to speak to widespread literacy in some communities, a process that included a developing ability to find and (eventually) create human-made symbols to stand for things. Even after the invention of the alphabet, it took the Greeks nearly five centuries to use literacy as a mode of intellectual expression (as opposed to a way of merely naming objects and recording important acts of oral language). However, this transition permanently changed culture and its means of preserving and articulating vital knowledge.

Now we expect children to progress from oral language to decoding the system of symbols used in written language, and on to comprehending and responding to the meaning of most texts—in just three short years. Clearly literacy involves a large and diverse quantity of experiences, skills, and awareness. Any systematic approach to the teaching and learning of language and reading will work better for some children and teachers than others.

The idea that there are competing theories of reading is widely understood. One of the dominant theories argues for emphasizing decoding and comprehension using systematic and direct instruction of sound-letter correspondences, or "phonics." Another argues that a focus on litera-

ture and context is important for providing an environment that encourages children to want to read, often called "whole language." Politically, these ideas have found support, with extremists from the political right often arguing for "pure" phonics, while more radical educators argue that literacy is tied to political awareness and liberation. Because the code words used to discuss reading have become politically charged, conversation that centers around making decisions for reading programs can be problematic for educators and policymakers. Most reasonable assessments of reading acquisition now conclude that a balance between systematic and literature-rich approaches is needed if schools are to enable most children to learn to read.

These theoretical differences are important, however, because most of the new interventions have aspects of both approaches. And educators need to be able to assess how well their current educational practices address the literacy challenge facing their students. They should ponder the question: "Does the early reading and literacy curriculum in the school offer the right balance for the children in the school?" The answer to this question involves building an understanding of the approaches to reading instruction that are actually used in the school. It also involves understanding alternative approaches that might enhance what is already being done in the school, or that might be used to restructure the curriculum and better meet the learning needs of children.

Part I provides a framework for assessing early interventions and uses the framework to provide a summative review of six different types of interventions:

- Pre-kindergarten (early interventions that provide insight into different approaches to working with parents and children before they enter school),
- Kindergarten (different approaches to integrating reading instruction into whole day kindergarten, a means of focusing on starting with a balanced approach),
- Pullout (different approaches to working outside the regular classroom with children who are having difficulty learning to read),
- Classroom-wide (different approaches to enhancing, enriching, or restructuring reading for all children in the regular classroom),
- School-wide (different approaches to restructuring elementary schools to address fundamental challenges posed by having a high percentage of students who are having trouble learning to read), and
- Inquiry-based (approaches to engaging teachers in active inquiry about alternative approaches to reading and literacy instruction in the classroom).

The purpose of this review is not merely to provide a list of research-based programs. Indeed, if schools chose an intervention from a list or a set of reviews without reflecting on their current curriculum and instructional processes, they would have a low probability of choosing an approach that met the learning needs of children in their schools. Rather, the purpose of reviewing a diverse array of intervention strategies using a

consistent, systematic-review approach is to provide educators with constructs they can use to compare with their current programs. Indeed, the review provides a base of information that teachers can use to compare with and critique their own programs.

Why Focus on Improving Practice in Schools?

Most of the early interventions reviewed here have been developed by researchers who are advocates for their own approaches to school improvement. Most have based their models on their own reviews of the research evidence. Some may argue that their method should work in most schools. Such claims might be true if all children, all schools, and all educators did not differ substantially. However, there is great diversity in schools and among children, which means there probably is not "one best approach." And while the core approaches to early literacy instruction used in a state might encourage an appropriately balanced approach through its frameworks, it is up to the educators in schools to make the balance work for children in their schools. Therefore, the process of thinking about how to intervene starts with an understanding of current practice in the school.

In Part II we provide guidance for assessing the learning environment that can set the stage for planning for early interventions. We consider:

- *Assessing Current Practice* (an approach to assessing the features and outcomes of the current early reading and literacy program in an elementary school),
- *Setting a New Direction* (an approach to reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the current early reading and literacy program in relation to possible alternative approaches),
- *Designing an Intervention* (an approach to designing local interventions for schools or choosing one from among those that already exist), and
- *Assessing Impact* (An approach to developing an evaluation strategy for an intervention).

Through this process, teachers and administrators in schools can develop their own interventions that are designed based on research. Based on their reviews, they may choose to adopt a well-known method, such as one of those reviewed in Part I. Or they may decide to develop their own locally designed interventions. Either way, the process of reflecting on the curriculum in the school provides a basis for making informed decisions.

How to Use the *Guide*

This *Guide* is intended to provide a resource for elementary school teachers and site administrators who are interested in improving their early reading and literacy programs. It can be used in three different ways to achieve this end.

First, this *Guide* provides an easy-to-read overview of early reading and literacy intervention methods and programs, as well as suggests a way of thinking about early literacy program development. Thus, it can be read and shared by teachers and site administrators in a school. Used in this way, it will provide a common basis for conversation about reading.

Second, this *Guide* provides a step-by-step strategy for assessing the early reading and literacy program in

an elementary school, designing intervention strategies, and using inquiry-based approaches to assess the impact of interventions. A survey has been included that can be used by teachers to take stock of their own teaching practices. With this information in hand, teachers and site administrators can identify workable approaches for program development. Thus, it also can be used as a guide for improving practice.

Finally, this *Guide* provides a resource that can be referenced when teachers want to investigate different intervention methods. Since a common, systematic review approach was used to review early reading literacy interventions, the *Guide* provides a resource that can be used to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different intervention methods. It also suggests references for reading about different intervention methods. Thus, this *Guide* can be a school library reference to refer to when educators and others want to learn more about early reading and literacy intervention.

Part I. Research-Based Interventions

Not only are reading and literacy themselves complex, but theoretical approaches, classroom practices, and intervention structures to teach reading and literacy vary considerably. The school facing the decision about which intervention to choose or how to develop an intervention has a number of questions to answer. The problem is that comparing and understanding existing programs is like comparing apples and oranges.

To address this problem, we developed a Framework for Assessing Reading and Literacy Interventions, which is intended to enable a reasonably fair comparative description of all types of programs. Part I of this *Guide* relies heavily on this framework, which is introduced in the next section and applied to each of the thirteen programs covered in the *Guide*.

A Framework for Comparing Interventions

The Framework enables the comparison of diverse interventions by breaking them down into components, allowing consideration of these components in relation to a diverse set of literacy outcomes.

The program components, or "program features," are organized into five major "feature categories." These categories mediate between the school's existing philosophy and specific literacy outcomes (see Figure 1). Early literacy interventions typically include program features related to:

- Implemented philosophy
- Professional development
- Classroom instruction
- Organization or structure
- Parent involvement.

It is important that the features actually included in an early literacy intervention are linked together in a coherent way. School communities may choose an intervention to influence a specific outcome or to address a comprehensive set of outcomes. We have identified six reading and literacy outcomes that are essential for students to have by the end of fourth grade:

- Emergent literacy (reading readiness)
- Context-free decoding (Decoding A)
- Meaning-oriented decoding (Decoding B)
- Comprehension
- Composition
- Critical literacy.

Different reading programs focus on different reading and literacy outcomes. We used the framework to assess the research base for each reading intervention. It can also be used to guide planning for reading intervention.

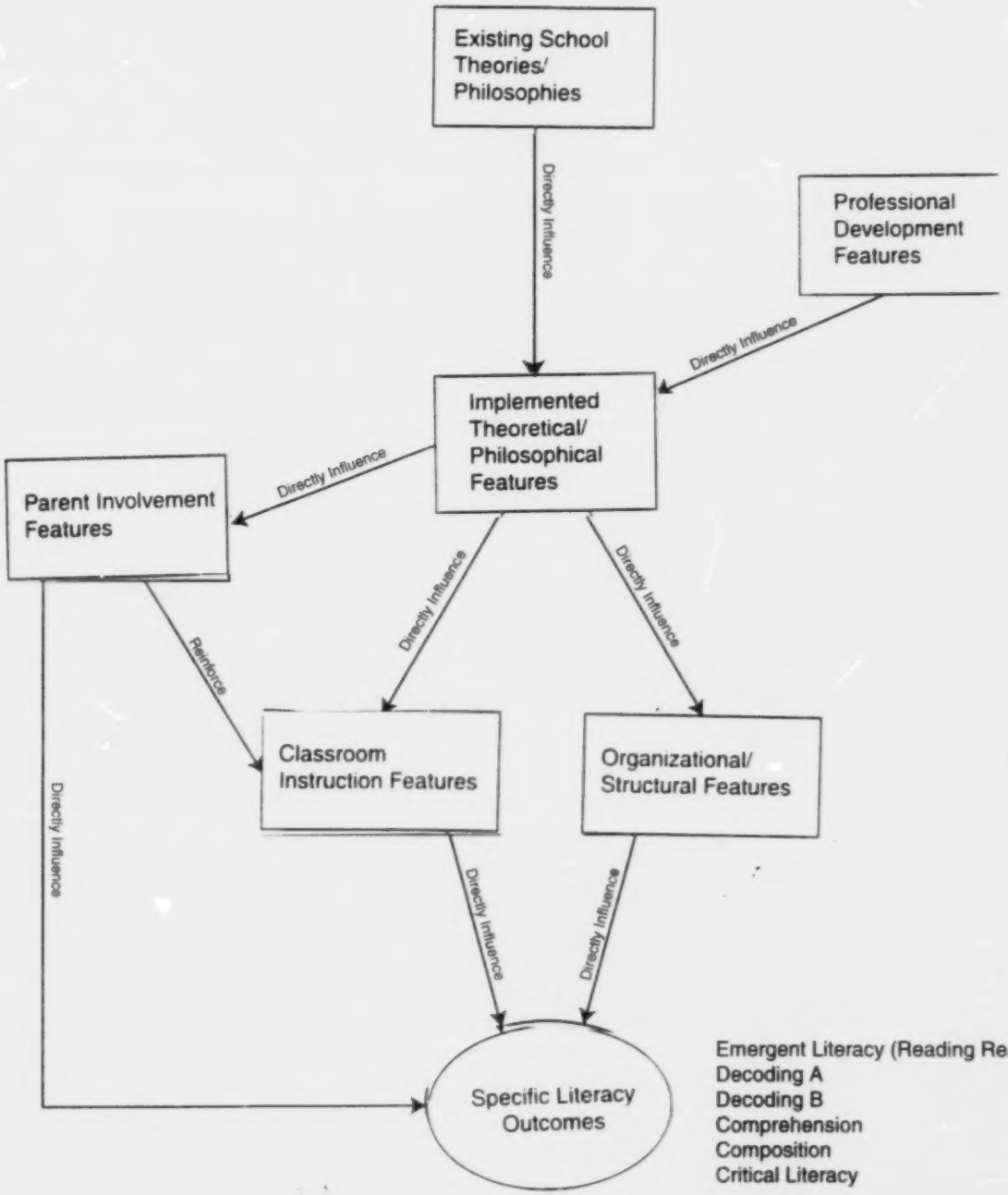
Identifying Research-Based Interventions

The framework was used for a two-part analysis of the research literature. First, we considered the intended effects of the intervention: what outcomes was the intervention designed to affect? Second, we analyzed the empirical research, or the actual effects of the intervention: which outcomes did the intervention actually affect in real classrooms?

The framework allowed us to assess the cohesiveness of different interventions. It also allowed us to see how a diverse set of program features can work together to affect desired reading outcomes. Using it, we were able to identify those resources (e.g., parental involvement features) that interventions were not tapping.

The model also helped us identify the outcomes an intervention is not designed or likely to affect, which is important since no intervention will affect all outcomes for everyone. For example, Reading Recovery emphasizes meaning-oriented decoding, while the Four Blocks Method affects both decoding A and B as well as comprehension.

Figure 1
Framework for Assessing
Early Reading and Literacy Interventions



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Preschool Interventions

What are preschool interventions?

Preschool interventions are designed to build a solid developmental foundation, which helps better prepare children for elementary school. They are typically focused on children's interactions with family and their home environments. By supplying such things as books, toys, health assistance, and training to parents, these interventions help create more developmentally rich environments. These in turn directly affect emergent literacy by improving oral language acquisition, concepts about print, attitudes toward reading, and so forth.

What kinds of preschool interventions are available?

National preschool programs specifically designed (at least in part) as early literacy interventions include Head Start, Even Start, and the Parent-Child Home Program. However, there are many preschool models, from Montessori to family cooperatives. Thus we present only a few models that can inform readers, but other methods also merit exploration.

What proportion of students is served in preschool interventions?

The proportion of students served varies greatly by community. Given the expense and limited funding, public funding for these interventions should be (and usually is) carefully targeted to children most at risk of not succeeding in school. However, many options are available in most communities on a fee-for-service basis.

What kind of school might want to consider a preschool intervention?

Schools that have significant percentages of children coming to school developmentally unprepared might consider a preschool intervention. Several researchers have characterized developmentally prepared first graders. Key features include the following: children should have gained control over oral language and motor coordination, they should be interested in their environments, and they should have interest in and awareness of books. Most of these abilities and awarenesses develop in rich environments, which preschool interventions are designed to help create.

Even Start

—By Kim Manoil and Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

Even Start is an early intervention program that aims to help break the poverty cycle by improving educational opportunities for low-income families. Since it is a family-oriented, preschool intervention, Even Start cannot be expected to directly influence most literacy outcomes; rather, the program aims to create a developmentally appropriate home environment. This approach should better prepare children for learning.

Even Start focuses on environmental change through adult education. The intervention offers courses in parenting skills, job search strategies, and some early childhood education. Because Even Start is a cooperative program that works with existing community resources, individual implementations look different.

At the national level, Even Start's core values emphasize that all children should be ready to learn; that schools should prepare all children for responsible citizenship, learning, and employment; that all adults should be able to read; and that schools should promote partnerships among parents, communities, and children.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

Again, since Even Start is a family-oriented, preschool intervention, it does not directly target literacy outcomes in the same way that other reading interventions (e.g., Four Blocks and Reading Recovery) do. However, the developmental and environmental emphasis is likely to affect emergent literacy. In addition, the long-term benefits of Even Start could indirectly affect all learning outcomes, though this would be difficult to measure.

Program Description

The program features of Even Start concentrate on the family and parents (see Figure 2). This concentration is informed by both whole language and especially developmental theories of learning.

Organizational/Structural Features

Because Even Start is implemented differently in every community, it is difficult to make generalizations about organizational and structural features. All Even Start interventions have the shared goal of helping pre-first grade children, and this goal is accomplished primarily through parent education.

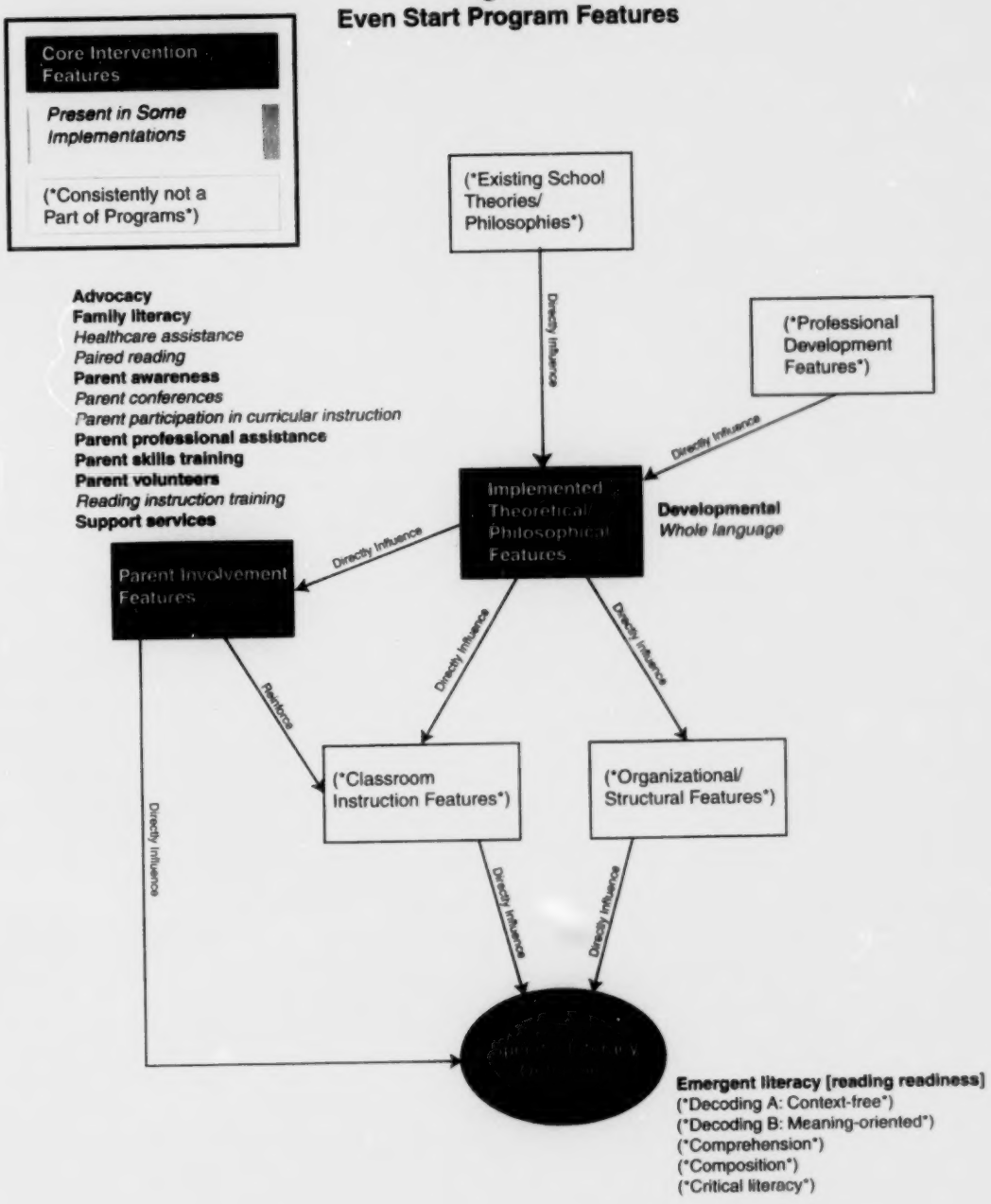
Classroom Instruction Features

Features in this category vary from preschool to preschool and are not explicitly outlined in the Even Start design.

Professional Development Features

Professional development was not explicitly addressed in the Even Start literature. Thus, it appears that profes-

Figure 2
Even Start Program Features



A quick glance at the figure above reveals that Even Start is not in itself a comprehensive literacy intervention. It does not address many of the feature categories, and the majority of the literacy outcomes are not directly targeted. Instead, the heavy emphasis on parent involvement along with the presence of theoretical/philosophical features indicate that the Even Start design should be conceived of as a highly targeted supplement to a community's early childhood education plan. It is designed to step in where traditional education might be insufficient to handle the special needs of communities with high percentages of students in at-risk situations. Specifically, Even Start aims to improve the health of whole families and bring them into their communities.

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sional development is left up to the communities that implement the intervention.

Parent Involvement Features

This feature category is the most important one in Even Start. Although these features vary by location, there is greater commonality among features in this category than in the others.

Generally speaking, Even Start utilizes advocacy, family literacy, health care assistance, parent awareness, parent conferences, parent participation in curricular instruction, parent professional assistance, parent skills training, and support services.

These features illustrate that Even Start is more focused on the family unit as a whole and how it fits into its community than it is on individual students in the classroom. Many of the features are designed to help parents succeed both as parents and professionally. Thus, the direct goal of Even Start is the health of families, and children's learning outcomes are seen as dependent on the health and success of their families—starting with the parents.

Research Base

To date, there is relatively little research on the Even Start program. Moreover, because each Even Start program is different, it is difficult to make generalizations about the program. There are quite a few studies that describe particular implementations and evaluate their effectiveness, but there is little overall research on Even Start as a national program.

The Even Start program does, however, cite several longitudinal studies, such as the Perry Preschool Project and the Carolina Abecedarian Project. These studies found positive long-term effects on child learning with pre-kindergarten intervention methods, and Even Start made use of many of the methods in these programs. But Even Start works less directly with the children themselves than did both the Perry Preschool Project or the Carolina Abecedarian Project. Instead, the Even Start program is more intensive in its focus on parent involvement.

The direct goal of Even Start is the health of families, and children's learning outcomes are seen as dependent on the health and success of their families—starting with their parents.

Summary: Program Strengths

The foundation for the ideas on which Even Start is based (i.e., programs such as the Perry Preschool Program) is well documented in research. The parent involvement features for most Even Start programs are highly developed and well done. Involving parents early in the process can only improve children's long-term chances for success.

Summary: Program Limitations

The Even Start program is not as intense an experience for children as other pre-kindergarten experiences (e.g., The Perry Preschool Project, The Carolina Abecedarian Project). Even Start is oriented more towards the family unit than to individual

students per se. This focus is not a problem as long as schools have a successful preschool program in place.

Another potential limitation of Even Start is the extent to which it must be adapted. In communities that have the desire and resources to make it work, Even Start could be highly successful. But in communities without high levels of personal, institutional, or financial commitment, Even Start's lack of a centrally defined program could result in limited success.

Key References

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Contact Information

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Parent-Child Home Program

—By Stacy Jacob and Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

The Parent-Child Home Program [PCHP] is a voluntary, home-based, two-year program designed to enhance the cognitive development of low-income, at-risk 2–4 year-old children. It aims to prevent educational disadvantage from occurring by targeting emergent literacy/school readiness by increasing appropriate interaction between children and their parents.

The foundation of the program is to provide families with bi-weekly exposure to home-based stimulations (usually a book or a toy) in which trained paraprofessionals, called "home visitors" model appropriate verbal interaction and educational play.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

The Parent-Child Home Program targets a very specific audience: 2–4 year-olds. Consequently, the intended educational outcomes of the program include emergent literacy and school readiness.

PCHP's short-term goal is to provide cognitive enrichment and enhancement of a child's conceptual and social-emotional development during the years of early language development. The long-term goal of these interactions is preparation for school and prevention of later school problems.

Program Description

The Parent-Child Home Program is organized around home-based parent-child interactions (see Figure 3).

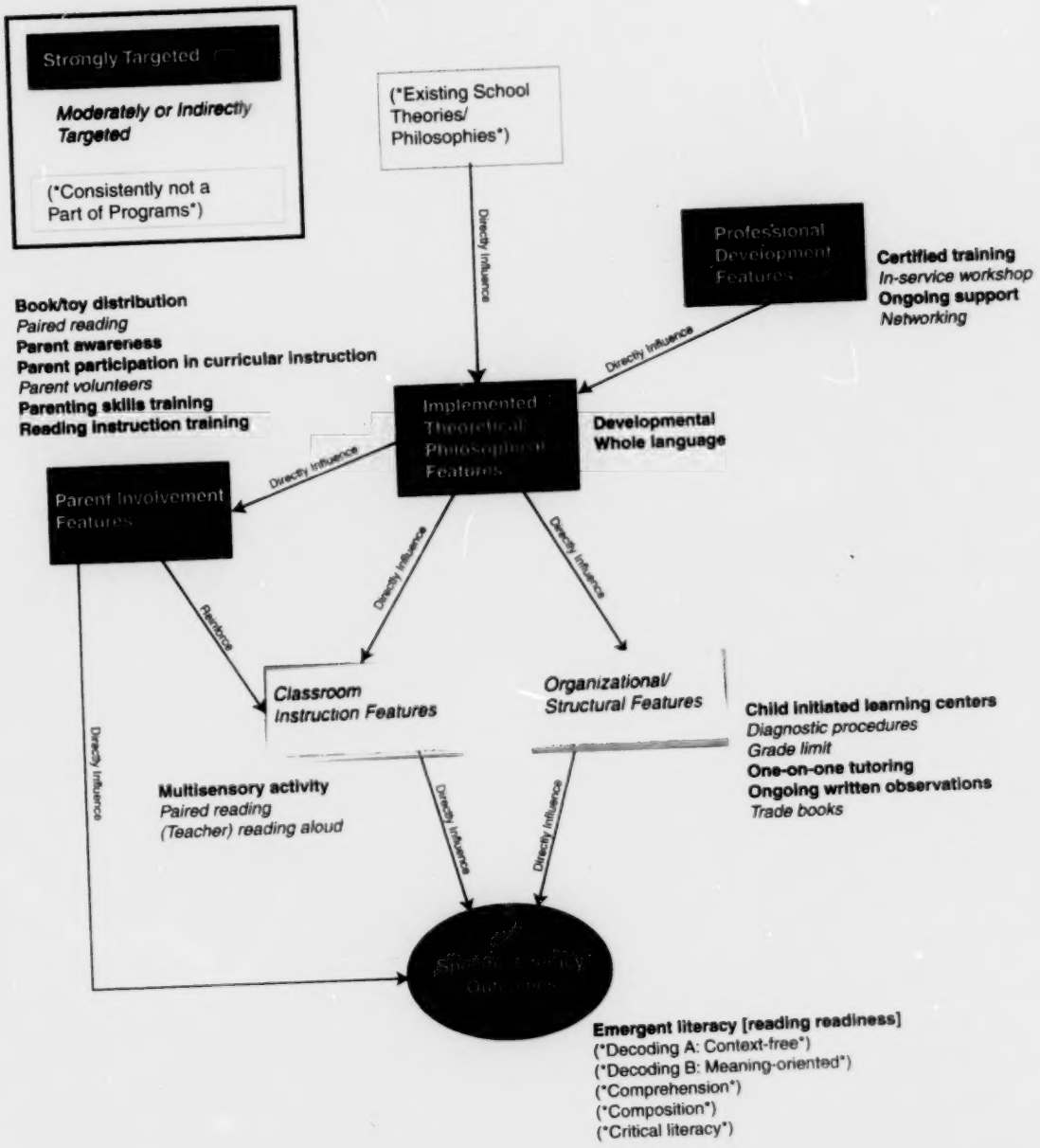
Organizational/Structural Features

The Parent-Child Home Program's organizational and structural features reflect its specific audience and purpose. The program is limited to at-risk preschool children. The program consists of twice weekly, half-hour home visits by a trained home visitor. This home visitor models, without directly teaching, verbal interaction between parent and child, in one-on-one play sessions using carefully chosen toys and books. Home visitors also keep anecdotal written records of each session they have with a parent and child.

In-home Instruction Features

The in-home instruction features are spread across two weekly sessions. The first session of each week usually introduces the new book or toy. Non-prescriptive guide sheets that contain the curriculum of each visit are used by the home visitors and are also provided to the parents. The guide sheets contain a list of verbal interaction techniques that the home visitor should use in modeling use of the toys and books. These techniques include suggestions on how to read to the child (e. g., showing and reading

Figure 3
Parent-Child Home Program Features



The Parent-Child Home Program is a family-oriented preschool intervention. Its primary goals are developmental in nature, and so, of the literacy outcomes, it links directly only to emergent literacy. Because it takes place exclusively in homes, it has few classroom instruction features and organizational/structural features. Instead, the program is centered on a philosophy that is developmental and informed by the whole language goal of empowerment. A solid professional development component trains the paraprofessionals who go to the homes, and once there, they model paired reading, reading aloud, and other positive adult-child interactions with books and toys that families may keep and reuse.

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the title page, showing and describing how to turn the pages, reading in a clear voice, asking questions about the illustrations, etc.) and how to play with the child (e.g., being reflective and asking questions about their play and how it may relate to their experiences).

The second session reviews these materials. It is expected that the parent will play with the child using the book or toy and master the material throughout the week.

Professional Development Features

The National Center for the Parent-Child Home Program provides training for PCHP Coordinators. The training focuses on conducting home visits, hiring, training, and guiding home visitors, assisting families to access social services, and working with pre-kindergarten and other early childhood programs in the community.

The home visitors themselves are usually unpaid volunteers or paid paraprofessionals. All home visitors are trained in an initial eight-session training workshop and receive ongoing support in weekly conferences with the Coordinator throughout the process. They receive training in techniques necessary to conduct the home visits as well as in ethical standards and respect for families' privacy and ethnic and cultural background.

Furthermore, an annual conference is held for PCHP Coordinators that provides an opportunity for networking and support from colleagues. The conference also provides updates on developments in early childhood education and PCHP research.

New PCHP sites are reviewed after two years of operation and certified as authentic PCHP replications. Brief forms are completed annually to display the PCHP's adherence to the national center's standards.

Parent Involvement Features

The feature category with the greatest emphasis in the Parent-Child Home Program is its parent involvement component. The essence of the program is to increase verbal interactions between the parent and child through modeling of parenting techniques that enhance the learning environment at home. Such techniques include the appropriate use of books and toys in educational play to stimulate children's desire for learning, how to show verbal affection and approval of the child, and how to converse with the child. This modeling is conducted to encourage parents to increase positive interactions with their children. The books and toys that are used by the home visitor are given to the families to encourage similar interactions between child and parent when the home visitor is not present.

Support services may also be provided to the families involved in PCHP through assistance in accessing community resources that may be available to them.

Research Base

There are over 20 years of research on PCHP. This research base demonstrates the effectiveness of PCHP in a variety of areas, although there are some inconsistencies that may need to be looked at more closely.

Overall, the research suggests that PCHP parents develop high verbal responsiveness that continues throughout their child's school years.

Such responsiveness correlates with a variety of short-term school readiness and long-term school performance outcomes including increased scores in reading, math, task orientation, self-confidence, social responsibility and IQ. There is also evidence that PCHP participants ultimately graduate from high school at higher rates than similar children who did not participate in the program.

Summary: Program Strengths

The Parent-Child Home Program is a community-based intervention designed to be a tool in helping break the poverty cycle. It better enables the public educational system to prepare all children for lifelong success.

By providing materials and focusing on empowering parents, PCHP increases the generalization of the skills acquired to parent-child interactions throughout a child's life.

In addition, PCHP has several features that illustrate the program's emphasis on and respect for the integrity of the family unit. Sessions take place in homes at families' convenience. PCHP also respects and incorporates features of families' cultural differences. Furthermore, because there is no direct teaching involved in the sessions, the program should empower parents to experiment and adapt the interactions to meet the needs of their children.

Summary: Program Limitations

The Parent-Child Home Program, in spite of its literacy-related emphasis, is a developmental preschool program. It is designed to build a foundation for later schooling, but it is not designed to directly affect literacy outcomes and is not a substitute for a balanced and comprehensive reading program in kindergarten and elementary school. Rather, it prepares the children most at-risk of not achieving success in school. In spite of its reliance on volunteers and paraprofessionals, the costs of the program can be as high as $1,200 per parent-child dyad per year. These costs could limit the number of families reached by the program.

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Full-Day Kindergarten

What is full-day kindergarten?

Full-day kindergarten is an extension of existing kindergarten classrooms into a full day. Some full-day kindergartens also include curriculum enhancements, while others mainly extend the day to give children more time on their existing activities.

What kinds of full-day kindergarten interventions are available?

While full-day kindergartens are fairly widespread across the U.S., there are no prepackaged models available. Most schools develop their own models, and a significant number of descriptive research articles are available for schools looking for examples.

What proportion of students is served in full-day kindergarten?

Full-day kindergarten is a classroom-based strategy. However, not all students attend full-day kindergarten. Some full-day kindergarten programs are reserved for children in at-risk situations. Also, kindergarten participation is optional in some states, including Indiana, and many programs offer parents a choice between half-day and full-day kindergarten.

What kind of school might want to consider a full-day kindergarten?

Kindergarten is designed to ease the transition between preschool and first grade. Its targeted literacy outcomes are usually limited to emergent literacy, although some schools are also providing early instruction in decoding A-related skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondences). For this reason, schools that are concerned about children's first grade readiness and/or emergent literacy might want to consider full-day kindergarten.

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Full-Day Kindergarten

—By Kim Manoil and Jeffrey Bardzell

School communities throughout the United States are experimenting with the concept of full-day kindergarten programs. Lawmakers, educators, and school administrators need to know how to maximize the benefits of this program.

Unfortunately, this kind of information is difficult to acquire: full-day kindergarten is not a single, clearly defined program, and there is substantial variation across locations. Despite these limitations, we can characterize the full-day kindergarten implementations that have the greatest long-term benefits.

Two Approaches to Full-Day Kindergarten

The research literature describes two different types of full-day kindergarten programs: developmentally-oriented programs and programs with embedded curriculum enhancements.

The first type views the extension of the day itself as the vehicle for change. This type is grounded on the developmental view that children benefit from more time in the classroom, and the primary goal is unchanged from that of standard half-day kindergarten: to prepare children for first grade and school life in general.

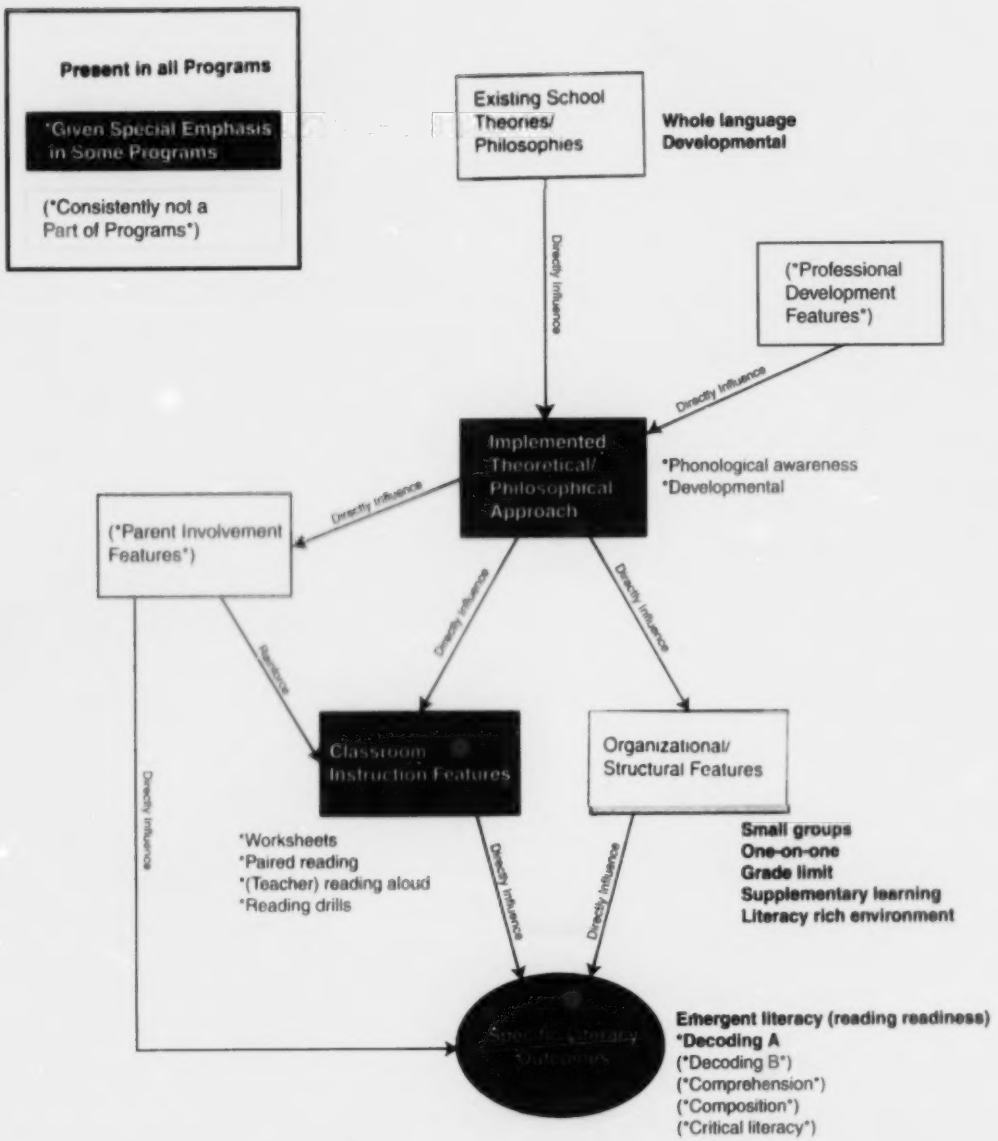
Most of the full-day kindergarten programs described in the literature appear to be consistent with the first type: programs with a predominantly developmental orientation. The only program features that distinguish these programs from traditional half-day programs are the additional time and any structural changes that come about as a result, e.g., increased small group instruction.

The second type of full-day kindergarten views the extension of the day as an opportunity to implement curricular change. Such changes might include an enhanced approach to a specific topic, such as math or literacy. In this sense, a full-day kindergarten with an enhanced literacy component can be used as an intervention, in addition to its traditional developmental purpose. Fewer in number, programs using this alternative approach are distinguished not only by structural features, but by philosophical and/or instructional changes to the developmental curriculum as well.

A graphic comparison of the two types of full-day kindergarten programs is depicted in Figure 4. This schematic illustrates the relationship among different types of features and how they relate to intended literacy outcomes.

The first type of full-day kindergarten programs is indicated with the light gray shading of Figure 4. The second type of full-day kindergarten programs incorporates the dark-gray shaded features as well as the light-gray ones on Figure 4.

Figure 4
Full-Day Kindergarten Program Features



Described in the literature are two distinct types of full-day kindergarten programs. The more common type of program primarily extends the day, carrying forward the exisiting school philosophies that focus on whole language and developmental issues. A second type of full-day kindergarten programs not only extends the day, but also supplements the kindergarten curriculum with enhancements, including implemented philosophical features and classroom instruction features. The second type is more comprehensive and cohesive, and preliminary evidence suggests that it yields more long-term results.

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Targeted Outcomes

Most research indicates that full-day kindergarten shows an increase over half-day kindergarten in the area of emergent literacy, or reading readiness. Emergent literacy is a complex outcome, comprising knowledge about print, growing phonemic awareness, and an increasing interest in the literacy experience. However, most studies on this type of program do not consider the sustained impact on literacy achievement in later grades, nor is there a logical reason for this approach to have a sustained effect.

The second type of full-day kindergarten—the curriculum enhancement approach—introduces instructional and philosophical modifications. These programs include a combination of language rich and developmental philosophies along with instruction in phonics or instruction emphasizing phonemic awareness. The extra time allows for a more diverse array of literacy-related activities than is possible in a half day classroom.

Program Features

For example, the full-day kindergarten program in Evansville, Indiana integrated more diverse instructional strategies, including the following approaches and techniques:

- *Worksheets*, a technique that reinforces direct instruction in phonological awareness
- *Paired reading*, an approach to facilitating reading awareness and the fundamentals of reading that reinforces both the whole language and phonological awareness approaches
- *(Teacher) reading aloud*, in which teachers read to children, a technique that enriches child development and language acquisition
- *Reading drills*, a set of direct instruction techniques that carry forward an emphasis on phonological awareness.

The intended outcomes of the Evansville program included and exceeded the developmental preparation and socialization seen in the first type of full-day kindergarten. Embedded in the program itself was a balanced literacy intervention. In addition to emergent literacy, this program also targeted context-free decoding (the ability to recognize letters and related sounds).

Studies conducted on the Evansville, Indiana full-day kindergarten program revealed that students had higher gains in emergent literacy compared to children in traditional half-day programs. These students also had higher gains on standardized test scores, higher report card scores, and a lower rate of retention through seventh grade.

Research Base

Research on full-day kindergarten programs that make philosophical and instructional modifications also found significant improvement in emergent literacy. In addition, these studies documented other gains, although some of the results were mixed.

Studies conducted on the Evansville program revealed that students in this program had higher gains in the

area of emergent literacy when compared to students in traditional half-day kindergarten programs. The students in Evansville's full-day kindergarten program also had higher gains on standardized tests and higher report card scores through seventh grade. In addition, this site also found decreases in retention.

School communities should design their full-day kindergarten programs to include this balanced approach. Also, they should consider supporting these interventions with parent components and appropriate professional development. Evidence of program features in these two feature categories was quite limited in the full-day kindergarten literature, but both types of program features may contribute significantly to the cohesiveness and success of interventions. Examples of parent involvement features and professional development features include:

- Family literacy
- Book distribution
- Paired reading, related to the *parent involvement* component; and
- Certified/university training
- Ongoing support
- Networking, related to the *professional development* component.

Simply modifying the structure/organization of a kindergarten program by increasing the time available for literacy instruction can improve emergent literacy (or reading readiness) by the end of kindergarten. On the other hand, using the additional program time in a full-day kindergarten program to increase the program's diversity of instructional and philosophical techniques may increase the impact such programs have on long-term literacy achievement.

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Pullout Programs

What are pullout programs?

Pullout programs remove children from their regular classrooms for some kind of special instruction, often in a one-on-one setting.

What kinds of pullout interventions are available?

Reading Recovery is the most well known pullout intervention in the United States at present. We also include here for comparison purposes a review of Programmed Tutoring, an experimental pullout program developed and disseminated in the 1960s and 70s. While Programmed Tutoring is not currently available, it merits review by readers who are interested in developing local methods for pullout instruction. The project used an experimental approach that provides insight into the types of one-on-one interventions that influence students to learn how to read and comprehend.

What proportion of students is served in pullout interventions?

While this number can vary, it is usually between ten and twenty percent. As with preschool interventions, careful targeting and diagnosis are critical to ensure that the intervention reaches children who can most benefit from it. Given the low percentages of students reached, it is unreasonable to expect whole classes (not to mention schools) to show significant improvement in test scores. Rather, to evaluate whether a program is successful, schools need to consider improvement among the lowest achieving 20% across several indicators, including test scores, referrals to special education, retentions in grade, and attitudes toward reading and school.

What kind of school might want to consider a pullout intervention?

Pullout programs are designed to help the few students who are struggling in regular classrooms. Schools enjoying success overall with regard to reading and literacy but that have a small number of struggling students should strongly consider a pullout intervention. On the other hand, schools with large numbers of students at risk of not learning to read will probably not be able to reach the number of students they need to with this type of intervention. For these schools, a classroom-wide or school-wide intervention may be more appropriate.

Reading Recovery

—By Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

Reading Recovery is a pullout, one-on-one reading intervention for the lowest achieving 20% of students in first grade. The program is designed to bring those students up to grade level. To do so, the intervention helps children make the difficult transition from decoding to comprehension.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

Reading Recovery targets a very specific audience within a defined period of time. For this reason, Reading Recovery deliberately excludes the reading outcomes that are most affected before and after the first grade.

The result is a program entirely aimed at the first-grade outcomes of decoding and comprehension. Specifically, the intervention helps children develop strategies to cross the gap between context-free decoding (including phonics) and comprehension in the most robust sense of actually understanding full texts.

The program identifies an intermediate reading outcome, a reconceptualization of decoding. This outcome is meaning-oriented decoding (decoding B), and it is understood as a network of strategies (phonics, semantic, syntactic) used in concert for "meaning-getting."

By preventing an over-reliance on a limited number of strategies, the intervention improves reading comprehension even as it motivates children to read more.

Program Description

Reading Recovery is a comprehensive and cohesive reading intervention (see Figure 5). Program features are described in more detail below.

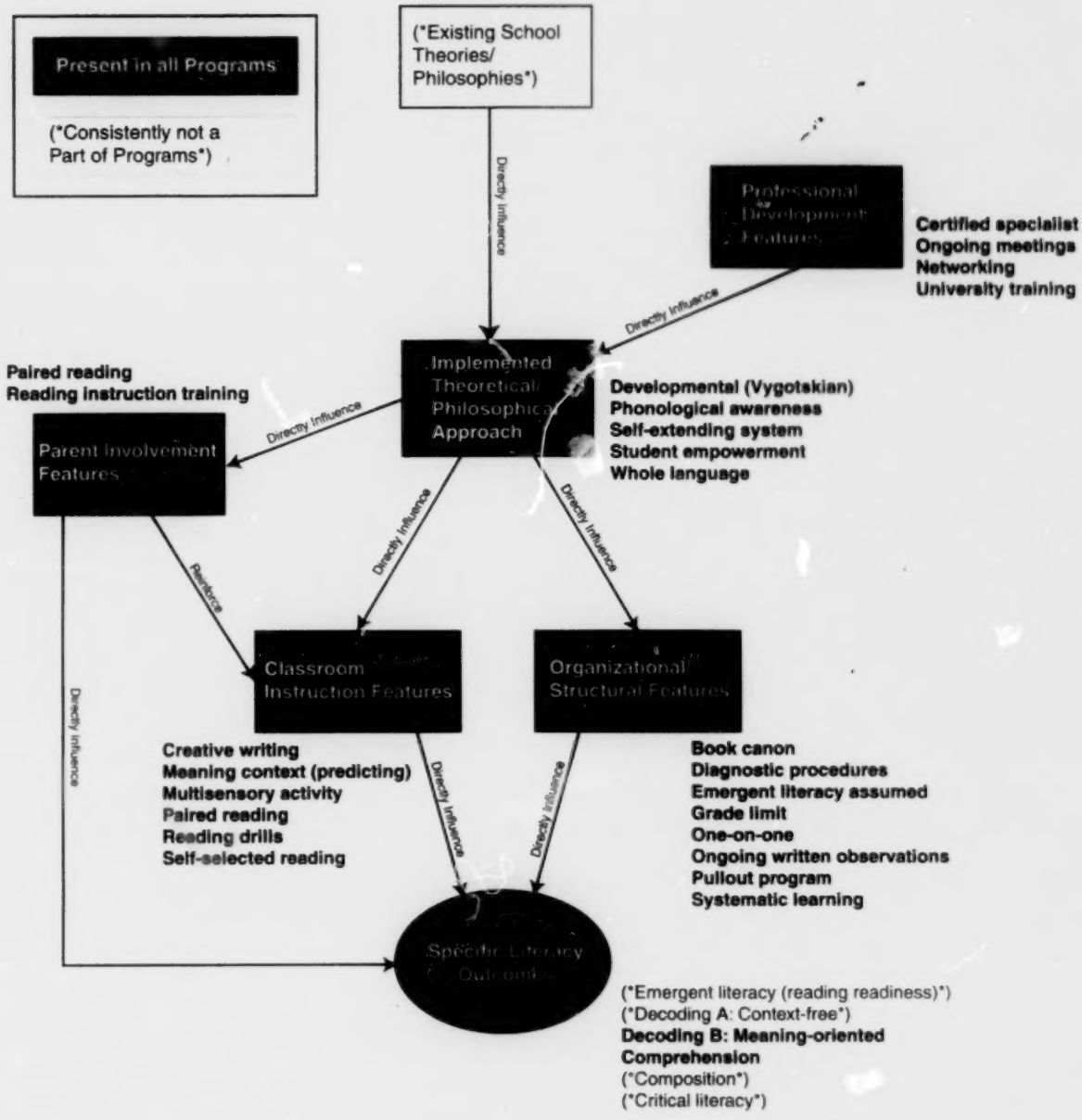
Organizational/Structural Features

Reading Recovery's organizational and structural features reflect its audience and purpose. Limited to first grade, it presumes the first grade student has mastered emergent literacy skills such as knowledge of letters and the alphabet, narrative and non-narrative structures, etc.

Children are pulled out of their classroom environments and meet with trained Reading Recovery teachers one-on-one. The teachers use extensive ongoing diagnostic procedures to understand precisely how each individual child is reading, identifying areas of strategic weakness.

Then, the teacher and child work together to develop a broader spectrum of successful reading strategies. This program is systematic, in that there is a well-defined course plan. Most children complete the course in 12–16 weeks, though there is no set time limit.

Figure 5
Reading Recovery Program Features



Reading Recovery takes a comprehensive approach to reading instruction. Its strong and diverse theoretical base is supported by a sophisticated professional development component and receives constant feedback via a well-developed set of diagnostic procedures. The reading instruction itself is made possible by structural changes—i.e., one-on-one, pullout, book canon—which are also replicated to an extent in the homes. Reading Recovery's design is not only comprehensive in that it includes features from all categories, but it is also coherent in that the features in different categories support each other.

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Classroom Instruction Features

Each lesson is divided into seven parts. These activities, lasting approximately 5 minutes each, are designed to reflect the complexity of the reading experience and provide practice in all aspects.

The activities involve creative writing, using context to predict, multisensory activities, paired reading, reading drills, and self-selected reading. Phonics is also taught, using magnetic letters to analyze words and to create new ones.

The instructional features, though they include phonics, are geared primarily to the meaning of the texts.

Professional Development Features

One of the most highly praised aspects of the Reading Recovery design is its professional development component.

With its sophisticated theoretical base—including its reconception of decoding—and its widespread implementation, Reading Recovery poses several challenges to schools attempting to implement it consistently.

For these reasons, Reading Recovery builds in a multi-level system of professional development. Teachers are trained by certified Reading Recovery trainers, who must complete their certification at a specified university (Purdue University for schools in Indiana).

After initial training, Reading Recovery teachers have ongoing meetings, with observations and networking with other Reading Recovery schools built into the process.

Parent Involvement Features

The reading activities used in the intervention are replicated in the home.

Parents are encouraged to come to school and observe Reading Recovery lessons. They are given training in helping their children learn to read in ways consistent with the program. Once home, the parents and children do paired reading activities.

Reading Recovery targets a very specific audience within a defined period of time. Specifically, the intervention helps children develop strategies to cross the gap between context-free decoding (including phonics) and comprehension in the most robust sense of actually understanding full texts.

Research Base

One of the most widely replicated reading interventions in the country (and even internationally), Reading Recovery has a substantial and growing research base.

There is strong evidence showing significant gains in first grade reading scores. In addition, some studies have found significant reductions in retention and referrals to special education.

Some research has questioned the long-term effectiveness of the intervention (see "Summary: Program Limitations" below).

Summary: Program Strengths

Reading Recovery is a well designed early intervention that

heavily targets a particular point in the learning process: when children transition from simple decoding to meaningful comprehension. Research shows that Reading Recovery is highly successful in helping children through this transition.

In addition, its approach to professional development is exemplary. Its professional development component ensures that teachers are well equipped to work with students most at risk of not learning to read.

In addition, it helps with consistency in program implementation, which should help encourage long-term positive effects in schools as teachers continue to participate in a learning environment that exposes them to innovations in reading instruction.

Summary: Program Limitations

Reading Recovery is not designed to be, by itself, all a child needs to learn to read. It was set up to address a specific and often troublesome part of that process, which overall takes years to learn. Thus the schools that implement it are still entirely responsible for helping children with emergent literacy and later outcomes, such as reading for content (e.g., in a history book) and critical literacy.

The findings that Reading Recovery's gains are not maintained are also troubling. One likely problem is an incompatibility between methods and materials in the program and those used by the regular school. It is crucial for schools to support the children who complete Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery is also more costly than other interventions. These costs limit the number of children the intervention can reach.

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Programmed Tutoring

—By Jeffrey Bardzell and Kim Manoil

Program Summary

Programmed Tutoring was a one-on-one intervention carried out in the mid-to-late 1960s whose key feature was that the tutors were not certified teachers, but rather non-specialists, including college undergraduates, parent volunteers, and in one experiment, tutors with mild disabilities.

The program and participants were continually changed in response to aspects that did not appear to be working. While this constant changing makes drawing generalizations difficult, the program is an excellent example of an inquiry-based approach.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

The intended outcomes of Programmed Tutoring changed as the program methods developed across experiments. In the beginning, the focus of the program was on teaching sight reading to mentally handicapped children to improve context-free word recognition, a comprehension outcome. Over time, researchers adjusted the program to increase the emphasis on meaningful context comprehension. Researchers also experimented with both decoding A, or phonological decoding, and decoding B using a synthetic cueing approach to access meaning.

Program Description

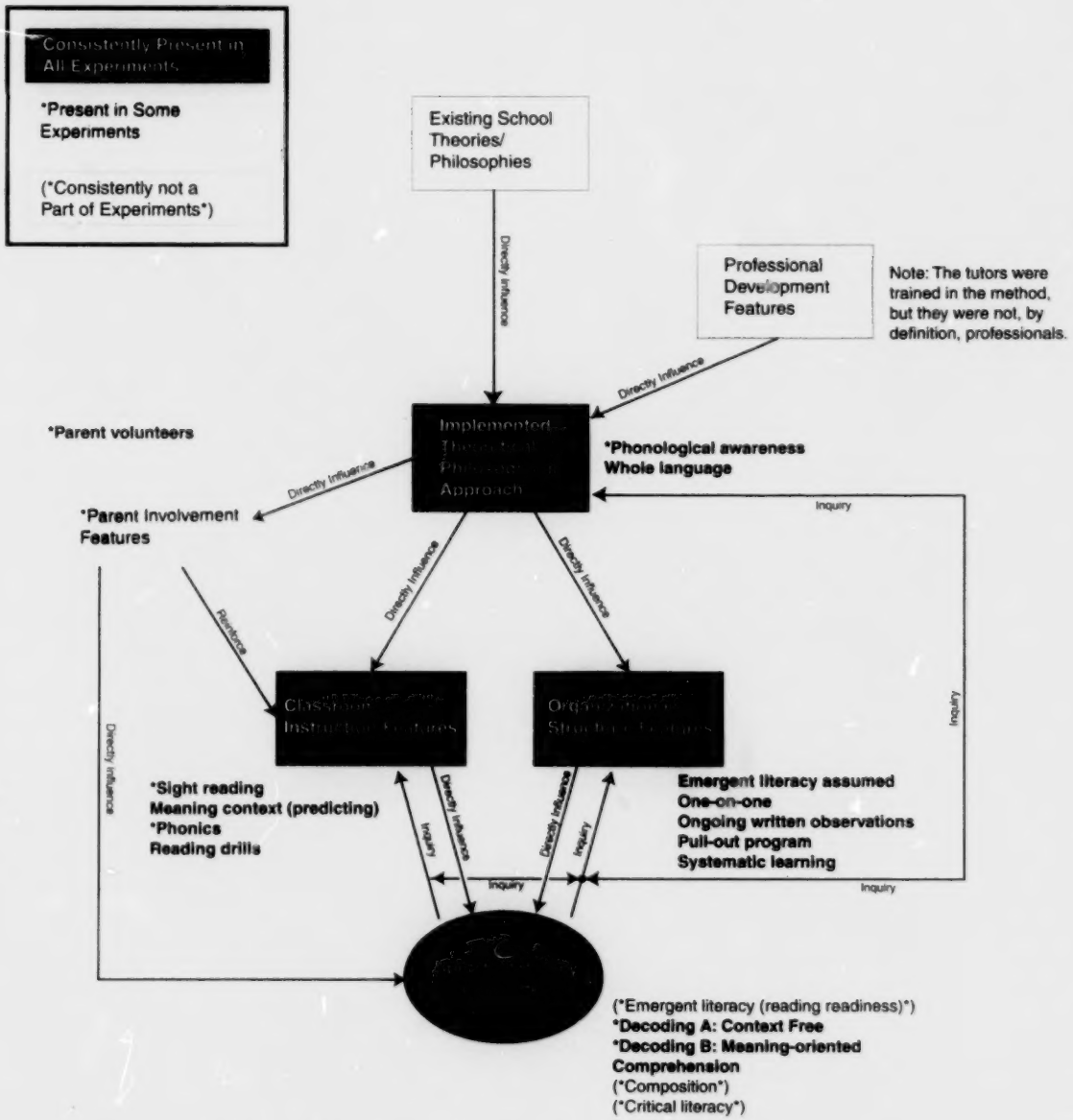
Different manifestations of Programmed Tutoring evolved dramatically over time (see Figure 6). The contents of the script changed, but the structure remained deeply similar throughout the experiments. The continual transformation of the program makes it difficult to describe the program features. Features included in the program at any one time are noted in the figure and described below.

Organizational/Structural Features

Programmed Tutoring was a pullout program with one-on-one instruction. As the program developed, tutors were trained in the recording of anecdotal information as the tutorials progressed. These ongoing written observations were kept in journals, and the information was used both to help in planning for the next day and overall in shaping the construction of future experiments. The combination of these journals and the switches and loops built in to the programmed lesson plans provided the means for a proto-Vygotskian approach, consisting of a customized and interactive process of learning (by the child) and instructional adaptation (by the program supervisors).

The structural feature, "emergent literacy assumed" was fundamental, as the program was primarily used with first graders. Systematic learning was also part of the programmed tutoring approach. Most of the experiments followed a similar theme with one or two controlled variations. Each of the

Figure 6
Programmed Tutoring Program Features



An experimental pullout program, Programmed Tutoring was focused on classroom instruction, organization, and implemented theory. While it used parent volunteers in some experiments, a parent component was not central to the program. One aspect that distinguished Programmed Tutoring was its inquiry approach: the practices and philosophies evolved closely in line with the observed outcomes of the instruction. This process is denoted on the figure with the inquiry arrows that connect outcomes, classroom instruction features, organization/structural features, and implemented theoretical/philosophical approach.

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experiments or variations of Programmed Tutoring followed a similar theme, the programmed script, which presented a stimulus and a series of loops and switches to provide increasing support/cues to help children "discover" the correct answers on their own. The lesson plans were governed by a mechanical metaphor, and the tutors were explicitly compared to "teaching machines," both in the design process and indeed in their presentation behind lighted screens.

Classroom Instruction Features

Various reading drills were pilot tested in the Programmed Tutoring experiments. These began with sight reading and later included phonics and meaning context/predicting. The experimenters expanded the stimuli from words to sentences and eventually to stories, increasingly supplying context. This combination of strategies, approaching reading from different angles, helped the children use both meaning context and phonics rules to correctly identify the words. In one version of the program, researchers coordinated the contents of the reading program with what was going on in the children's regular classrooms.

Professional Development Features

The program did not use professionals because the tutors were nearly always non-specialists. Furthermore, the lesson plans for the program were carefully scripted in advance. Thus the tutors, "programmed" to follow the script, had little need to exercise professional judgment, and program consistency was ensured. The tutors were trained, however, but the nature of the training varied by experiment. Training included testing procedures, the sight reading program, and (in some experiments) word analysis, and comprehension. Training was supplemented by home study and supervision.

Parent Involvement Features

The program did not have a parent component, except inasmuch as parent volunteers served as tutors in some of the experiments.

Research Base

Programmed Tutoring remained an experimental approach when it was being pilot tested. Experiments were done on variations of the program throughout its development. Conclusions drawn after a series of experiments summarize the emergence of a theoretical approach to teaching literacy in a pullout setting. The conclusions include the following:

- combinations of programmed tutoring and classroom instruction are more effective than either one alone;
- pictures, used as cues for word recognition, are much less helpful than originally believed;
- repetitive drilling is counterproductive; word analysis, or phonics, is a powerful technique for improving the accuracy of word recognition;
- increased use of context improved sight reading, phonics, and comprehension skills;
- the Programmed Tutoring method, which increasingly emphasized context, yielded the greatest results in the comprehension outcome;
- and using different techniques in sequence, rather than all at once, optimizes the acquisition of literacy.

The authors changed over time as to what they thought the best order of instruction should be, but they speculated that phonics may need to be taught at an earlier stage—a speculation that later research supported.

Summary: Program Strengths

The evolution of Programmed Tutoring serves as an important example of how an inquiry-based approach can inform the education community. Its evolution of discoveries mirrors and anticipates what has happened in the past 30 years of reading research.

Conclusions drawn from the various Programmed Tutoring experiments result in a summary of the emergence of a theoretical approach to teaching literacy in a pullout setting. One version of the program revealed significant positive effects for Programmed Tutoring and led to the first intervention that includes the following key criteria:

- that programs recognize the complexity of literacy acquisition by using a balanced approach;
- that programs are coherent, both internally and externally (i.e., how they fit into overall school curricula);
- that programs use an inquiry-based approach that focuses on reading outcomes.

Summary: Program Limitations

The program did not take into account the existing school philosophy, and indeed, initially no attempt was made to coordinate tutoring with regular classroom instruction, though later the tutoring used the same basal readers used in the regular classroom. As noted above, the feature category of professional development remained unused, since the program did not use professionals. The program did not have a parent component, except inasmuch as parent volunteers served as tutors in some of the experiments. Programmed Tutoring thus may have isolated children even as it helped them develop literacy skills, an isolation that pullout programs can individually introduce unless they are carefully integrated with children's school and home experiences.

Programmed Tutoring, like Reading Recovery, assumes emergent literacy. Further research must be done to determine whether this is an appropriate assumption or whether some emergent literacy instruction might benefit some children.

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Classroom-Based Interventions

What are classroom-based interventions?

Classroom-based interventions are reading and literacy programs designed for use in regular classrooms. As such, they are not usually tailored specifically to the needs of those students in at-risk situations; rather they are usually fairly comprehensive and balanced programs grounded in integrated theories designed to enable all children to succeed. The program features are heavily concentrated at the instructional and organizational levels, with comparatively fewer program features involving parents, professional development, theory, and teacher inquiry.

What kinds of classroom-based interventions are available?

As the traditional level of programming, teachers have an abundant selection of choices. Indeed, most basal series can be considered classroom-based reading programs. However, several comprehensive classroom-based reading and literacy interventions have developed more recently, including the three reviewed here: First Steps, Four Blocks, and the Literacy Collaborative.

What proportion of students is served in classroom-based interventions?

All the children in the class are served by these interventions, though children in other classes might participate in another program. However, children only participate in them as long as these interventions last, which can vary from one year (typically first grade) to all elementary grades.

What kind of school might want to consider a classroom-based intervention?

These classroom-wide interventions are all designed to work for all children. The interventions discussed below all are distinguished by a highly comprehensive and varied set of features and activities, which should be especially useful resources for schools with highly diverse student populations.

First Steps

—By Kim Manoil

Program Summary

First Steps is a classroom-based language development model that serves as a teacher resource for closing the loop between diagnostic observation of child development and classroom instruction. At the center of the model (and the process) are the developmental continua themselves; these continua list hundreds of behaviors and attitudes, grouped into several stages of development. The model provides teaching strategies, specific outcomes, and parent involvement ideas for each stage of development.

These continua—and the suggested material associated with them—were designed to enable an iterative process. This includes careful observation of child behavior, assessment of this behavior in comparison to the developmental continua, adoption of methods intended to build on strengths and improve areas of weakness, and back to observation and so forth.

The program is designed to meet the needs of all students regardless of age or range of abilities. In First Steps, the progress of all students is monitored, which enables them to progress based on their individual stages of development

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

First Steps provides a comprehensive set of developmental continua for reading, writing, spelling, and oral language. It addresses students at all stages of reading development and consequently, influences all reading outcomes.

The First Steps program identifies various stages of development for the areas of reading, writing, oral language, and spelling. Specific teaching strategies are emphasized at each of these stages. The specific outcomes that are targeted depend on the child's stage or "phase" of development.

Like Reading Recovery and the Literacy Collaborative, First Steps emphasizes developmental, meaning-oriented reading instruction. Consequently, emergent literacy, decoding B ("meaning getting"), comprehension, and critical literacy are the outcomes emphasized by the reading curriculum of the First Steps Program.

Throughout the stages of development, the program emphasizes strategies that foster students' independence and enjoyment of reading.

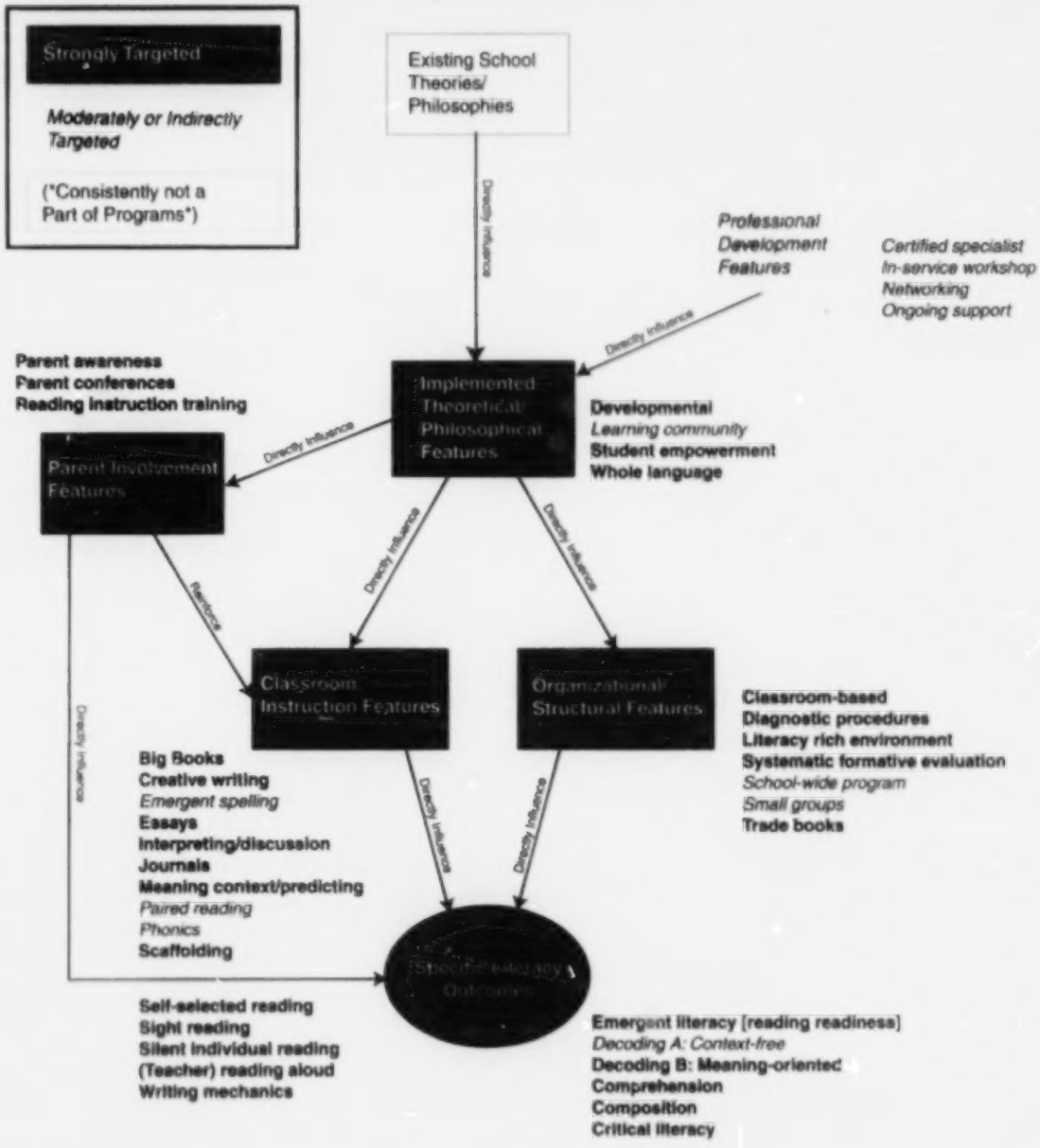
Program Description

First Steps is a comprehensive language development model (see Figure 7). Program features are described in more detail below.

Organizational/Structural Features

First Steps is a classroom-based program that is based on diagnostic procedures and systematic, formative evaluation. Because of the explication of language and literacy acquisi-

Figure 7
First Steps Program Features



Like most classroom-based approaches, First Steps has a comprehensive set of outcomes and a strong emphasis on the three primary areas of classroom instruction: implemented philosophy, classroom instruction, and classroom organization. It is comparatively weak with professional development, offering a model, but making it optional. The program does involve parents, especially in its features designed to teach parents how to help their children succeed with reading.

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tion along an extended developmental continuum, the implementation of First Steps as a school-wide program is optimal.

Teachers use the individual developmental continua both to guide their evaluation of what their students can do as well as to inform their planning for further development. Although continua are used, they are not intended to be a sequential order of progression. Instead, it is recognized that each student's developmental pathway is unique, and students may exhibit behaviors that are indicative of various phases of development. The continua are used to reflect a developmental view of learning and teaching to guide classroom instruction.

The First Steps program emphasizes the need for a literacy rich environment with the use of trade books and small group activities.

Classroom Instruction Features

The instructional features used in First Steps depend on the developmental phase of the student. The strategies across the continua reflect the program's emphasis on meaning. These include storytelling, interpreting/discussion, meaning context/ predicting, big books, sight reading, self-selected reading, silent individual reading, creative writing, journals, essays, and invented spelling.

Other teaching strategies include scaffolding, phonics, and writing mechanics.

Professional Development Features

First Steps provides tutor courses and school-based courses for educators at the beginning of a school's implementation of the program. Tutor courses prepare educators to become users, presenters, and support providers for First Steps teachers within their district. Each component of First Steps (reading, writing, spelling, and oral language) has its own developmental continuum and teaching strategies. This makes it important for classroom teachers to be trained in each of the components through school-based courses.

Parent Involvement Features

Teachers include parents in the assessment and monitoring process of First Steps by asking them for observations they have made of their child at home. Parents are also provided with pages of ideas that suggest ways they can support their children's development at home. Specifically, parents are given information on how they can help with their children's reading. Parent involvement features thus include parent awareness, paired reading, parent conferences, and parent reading instruction training.

Research Base

The developmental continua used in First Steps were created as a result of a synthesis of research on literacy development conducted in countries across the English-speaking world. Research and evaluation studies were conducted by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) and their research consultant, Dr. Phil Deschamp.

This research has been interpreted as finding an overall positive impact on students, teachers, and schools as a result of First Steps implementation. Much of the research done is descriptive in nature. If test scores are provided, there is no sound means of comparison that allow one to attribute the gains made to the First Steps Program. These limitations were acknowledged by the researchers.

They noted that further research was needed to confirm these tentative results as well as determine the long-term impact of First Steps.

Summary: Program Strengths

First Steps is a comprehensive classroom-based literacy development model that targets all stages of language and literacy acquisition through the provision of various resources for the linking of assessment, teaching, and learning.

It provides a structure and guide for classroom teachers in an attempt to meet the needs of all children. Its use of a wide variety of instructional techniques that emphasize engaging students in meaningful literacy interactions is designed to meet the needs of all children. If the program is implemented across grades, as the program suggests, First Steps should provide consistency in students' literacy instruction across several grades.

Summary: Program Limitations

The impact of First Steps is strongly dependent on teacher implementation of the strategies denoted in the program. This implementation is in fact quite demanding, since the program has four separate components, each containing a detailed developmental continuum and activities in two teacher's guides, which teachers must master prior to full implementation of the program. Also demanding is the program itself, which requires continual monitoring of all students' progress in light of the four elaborate continua.

Furthermore, there is a lack of confirmatory research on the effects of First Steps. Research that has been conducted is descriptive in nature or does not provide any means of comparison for the First Steps program.

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Four Blocks

—By Kim Manoil and Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

Multi-level, Multi-Method Instruction, commonly referred to as the Four Blocks Method, is a framework that provides an organized, systematic structure for providing early literacy instruction. The program is primarily used in first grade but has also been applied to other early grade levels.

The Four Blocks framework is designed for children with a wide range of abilities. Its design implements a wide variety of highly adaptable literacy instruction techniques that allow teachers to avoid ability grouping altogether. These techniques fit into an overall framework comprising four blocks: Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

The Four Blocks Method focuses on three intermediary literacy outcomes: both types of decoding (context-free and meaning-oriented) and comprehension. This focus provides a balanced, intermediary literacy instructional framework that develops basic reading skills.

Although many aspects of Four Blocks assume that children have acquired emergent literacy skills (knowledge of letters and the alphabet, narrative and non-narrative structures), some of its techniques target instruction in these areas. These include "pretend reading" (telling the story of a familiar book without actually reading the words) and "picture reading" (talking about the pictures in a book).

Furthermore, the Four Blocks framework does not explicitly target critical literacy skills, although the program may foster such development as a result of the intermediary reading foundation skills it provides and the variety of instructional techniques included in the program.

Program Description

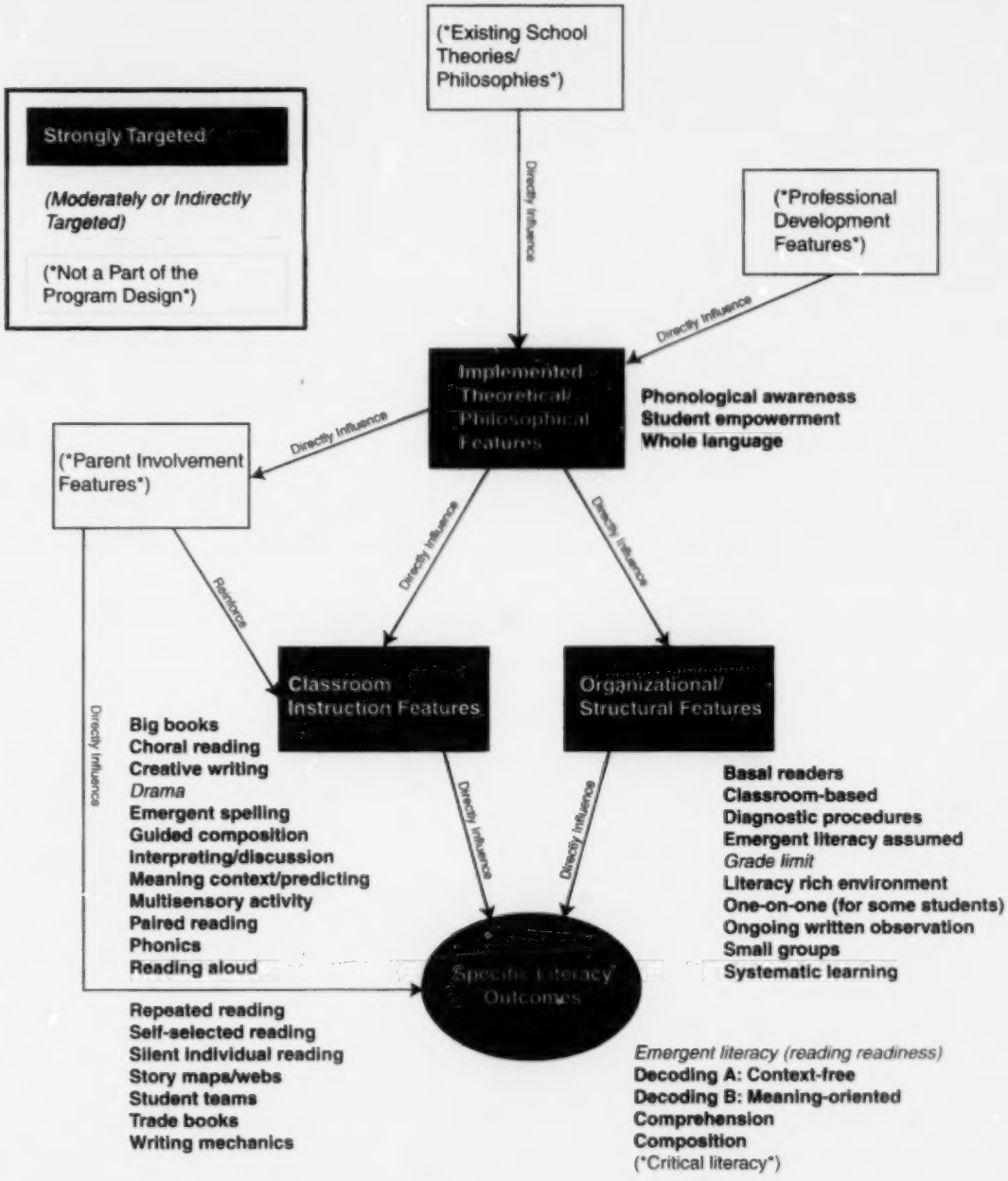
The Four Blocks Method is a systematic framework for instruction in intermediary literacy skills (see Figure 8). The wide array of program features that work together to foster the acquisition of these reading outcomes is described in more detail below.

Organizational/Structural Features

The Four Blocks Method's wide range of organizational and structural features enable it to reach children with a variety of ability levels and learning styles.

The program provides a framework for systematic classroom-based language arts instruction. The language arts instructional time is divided into four 30-40 minute blocks, which are performed daily: Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words.

Figure 8
Four Blocks Program Features



The Four Blocks Method takes a balanced, comprehensive approach to reading instruction. The program implements a wide range of classroom instructional techniques (e.g., phonics, self-selected reading, predicting, guided composition) that are based on a balanced theoretical approach (phonics and whole language) to reading instruction. Although this framework is quite systematic, teachers are able to modify structural aspects (small groups, one-on-one instruction), when their ongoing written observations reveal that children need additional or modified instruction. The details of professional development and parent involvement are left up to individual schools.

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Diagnostic procedures, such as ongoing written observation, are used within the classroom. Teachers meet with students individually on a regular basis to take anecdotal notes on their reading. Individual conferences are held with children to discuss the books they are reading in the self-selected reading block. Small group and informal one-on-one instruction are also provided for students who are not reading at their instructional level.

Classroom Instruction Features

The Guided Reading Block begins as a teacher-led large group reading time and eventually shifts to students reading with partners or alone. Although basal readers have traditionally been used in this block, teachers also use other materials such as Big Books and trade books.

The Self-Selected Reading Block involves children reading trade books alone or with partners. As a part of this block, children take turns sharing their books with the whole class. The Writing Block usually involves a brief (10 minute) mini-lesson to the entire class followed by individual student writing and editing.

In each of the three preceding blocks, there is a back-and-forth movement between individual and classwide instruction, which fosters both individual skills and a literate community.

The Working With Words Block involves teacher-led and small group activities that reinforce reading and spelling patterns. For example, children practice learning to read and spell words posted on the word wall through chanting, clapping, and writing activities. Children also manipulate letters to make words called out by their teacher in the "making words" activity.

Professional Development Features

There is no standard professional development component for the Four Blocks Method. The model assumes that professional development and training will take on various forms depending on the school and availability of professionals knowledgeable of the program. Books, videos, and Internet news groups are available for training purposes. Some teachers also use study groups.

Parent Involvement Features

The Four Blocks Method also lacks a standard parent involvement feature. The program leaves the details of this component up to the individual school.

Research Base

Relatively little research has been conducted on the Four Blocks framework. Research that has been conducted to date indicates that children show gains in the areas of context-free decoding (A) and meaning-oriented decoding (B) as well as comprehension. Since these are the targeted outcomes, these findings are encouraging to the program.

However, most of the research lacked proper controls. Thus, additional research needs to be conducted to verify these findings.

Summary: Program Strengths

The Four Blocks Method provides a balanced framework for literacy instruction for children with various ability levels and learning styles. Its variety of instructional techniques appropriately emphasizes the core reading outcomes. This type of program ensures that instructional time is balanced across the various

aspects of literacy instruction: reading with others (Guided Reading), selecting materials to read alone (Self-Selected Reading), experimenting with and composing within the structure of written language (Writing), and learning spelling and reading patterns (Working with Words). This balanced, comprehensive approach seems likely to help children become more skilled in all areas of literacy.

Although it is a classroom-wide approach, the program is flexible enough to allow for individual and small group instruction when needed.

The comprehensiveness and flexibility of the Four Blocks framework also increases its acceptability in diverse kinds of school systems. Furthermore, because the program is not a schoolwide restructuring intervention with significant professional development components, it should be considerably less expensive to implement than programs such as Success for All or the Literacy Collaborative.

Summary: Program Limitations

The Four-Blocks framework does not have a standard professional development component. Without this component, there may be inconsistent implementation of the program across schools. Variability in professional development features may create inconsistency in teachers' implementation of the program.

In addition, the lack of a standard parent component limits the generalization and reinforcement of the skills taught in the Four Blocks. Allowing individual schools to determine the details of these components might result in inconsistent parental involvement.

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Literacy Collaborative

—By Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

The Literacy Collaborative is a schoolwide restructuring model that focuses on classroom-based instruction, depending on Reading Recovery as a "safety net" for those students still not succeeding.

It was originally developed to respond to the problem of successfully discharged Reading Recovery students not receiving appropriate support in the classrooms when they returned.

Self-described as a professional development program, the intervention involves the whole school—especially teachers and families—in a comprehensive and reflective approach to literacy instruction, which is appropriate for all children.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

A comprehensive schoolwide intervention (see figure 9), the Literacy Collaborative was designed to influence all reading outcomes. However, consistent with Reading Recovery, the Literacy Collaborative emphasizes meaning-oriented reading instruction. The program is clearly designed around two reading outcomes: meaning-oriented decoding (or decoding B) and comprehension.

It would be false, however, to say that the other three outcomes are not substantially targeted. Several elements emphasize emergent literacy, context-free decoding (or decoding A), and critical literacy.

However, these outcomes are targeted in a way that makes them consistent with—yet subordinate to—the two main outcomes. Emergent literacy is targeted in meaning-oriented ways; context-free decoding takes place in the writing component; and critical literacy is the intended result of the meaning-driven activities.

Program Description

A significant element of the Literacy Collaborative is its literacy framework, which includes eight elements: four each for reading and writing (see Figure 9). It is within these elements that the program designers explain most of the program's features.

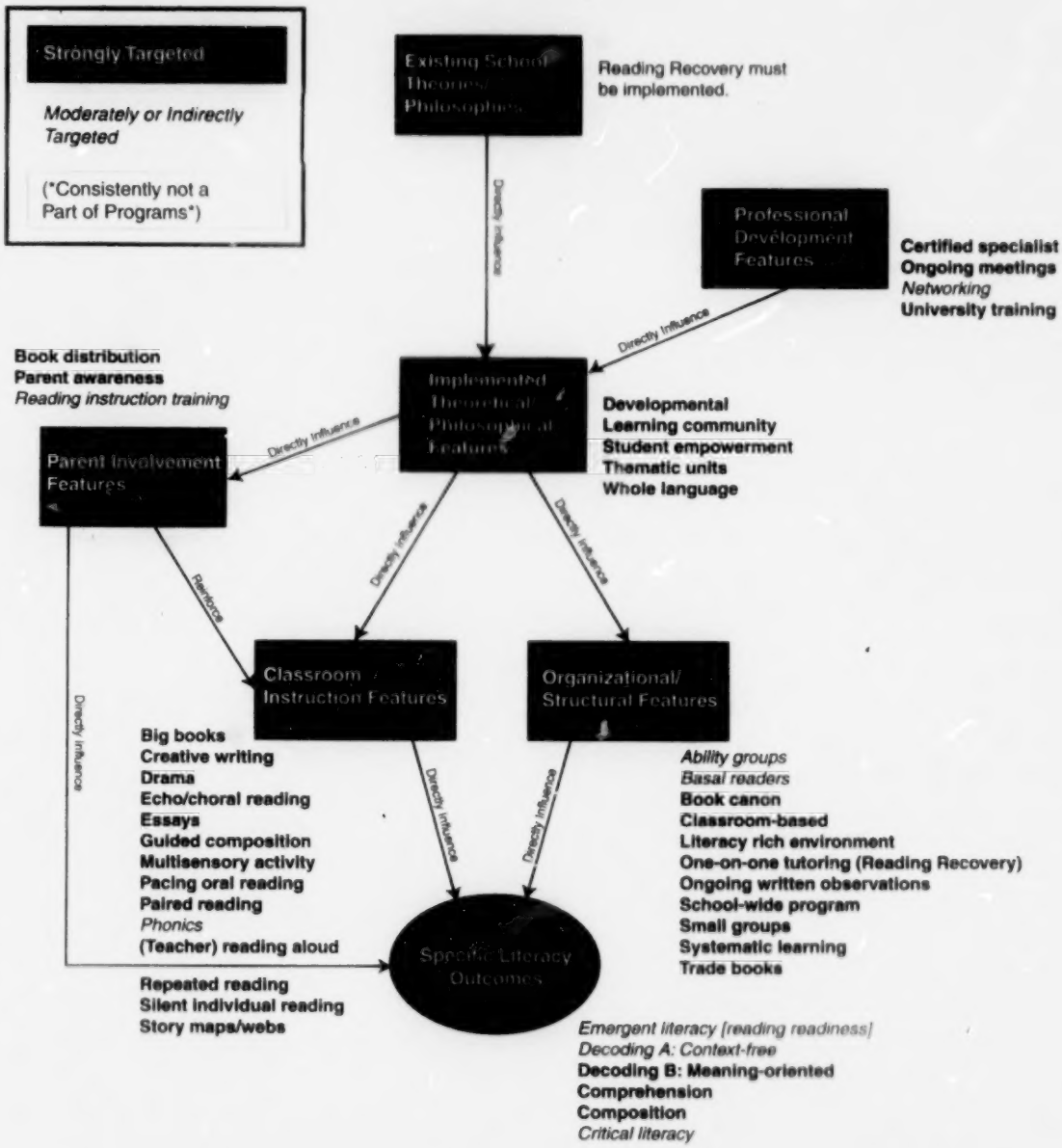
Organizational/Structural Features

The classroom-based orientation is given additional flexibility through the use of small groups, ability groups, and the use of one-on-one Reading Recovery instruction for those students still not succeeding.

The classroom's literacy rich environment reflects the centrality of the meaning-orientation in the intervention. So, too, does the high reliance on trade books. Trade books allow for greater self-selection than do traditional basal readers.

Two features, however, balance the self-selected reading emphasis: many of the trade books come from a master list (book canon) that the

Figure 9
Literacy Collaborative Program Features



The Literacy Collaborative is an intervention model somewhere in between a classroom-based intervention and a schoolwide reform. It is designed to affect a comprehensive set of reading outcomes. It follows Reading Recovery in combining a comprehensive diversified approach to meaning-oriented reading instruction with a sophisticated philosophical base for the whole school. To support the implementation of a philosophically rich program, Literacy Collaborative makes full use of parent involvement and professional development. Inside the classroom, the program balances reading and writing activities in a range of settings—one-on-one, small groups, ability groups, and classwide—to ensure that all children succeed.

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Literacy Collaborative provides, and these books are graded and leveled by difficulty. In addition, the intervention also makes use of basal readers.

Ongoing written observations enable teachers to monitor student progress and provide evidence of program effectiveness. As with other research-oriented interventions (e.g., Success For All), the Literacy Collaborative is designed to close the loop between intended outcomes and actual effects assessed empirically.

Classroom Instruction Features

As with other schoolwide reforms and classroom-based interventions, the Literacy Collaborative uses a wide variety of instructional features in concert to reach every child.

Most of the features—Big Books, choral/echo reading, creative writing, drama, essays, guided composition, paired reading, (teacher) reading aloud, silent individual reading, and story maps/webs—are consistent with the meaning orientation of the intervention and affect meaning-oriented decoding (Decoding B) and comprehension.

At the same time, other features are designed to affect the remaining outcomes, especially context-free decoding (or Decoding A). Among these are phonics, echo/choral reading, guided composition, multisensory activity, pacing oral reading, and repeated reading.

Professional Development Features

The Literacy Collaborative emphasizes the professional development component, albeit to a lesser degree than Reading Recovery.

As with Reading Recovery, the program uses a university-certified literacy coordinator, who maintains a connection to the university (Purdue University for schools in Indiana) throughout the process.

The Literacy Collaborative also has ongoing professional development for staff and includes networking.

Parent Involvement Features

Parent involvement is also a priority in the Literacy Collaborative model. Parents are encouraged to come into the school to see how their children are learning. This participation constitutes a kind of hands-on reading instruction training. It is also a way of keeping parents aware of what is going on in school.

At home, parents use inexpensive "KEEP" books distributed by teachers to read with their children.

Research Base

The Literacy Collaborative is a relatively new program and has not had sufficient time to develop a solid research base.

The program design appears to be set up so that it will collect sufficient data to determine its success. In addition, the program's methodology in its preliminary research appears sound. That schools will be in collaboration with universities to help analyze the data is also encouraging.

Summary: Program Strengths

For schools that use Reading Recovery, the Literacy Collaborative is a schoolwide restructuring process that is deeply consonant with Reading Recovery. In conjunction, the two interventions should reach all students as they learn to read.

Its instructional framework, parent involvement, and professional development are all cohesively integrated. If schools are interested in seeing a meaning-oriented literacy

instruction model, the Literacy Collaborative's design is exemplary.

The university liaison gives schools access to the latest in reading research. In addition, it helps ensure consistency of implementation. Finally, universities should be well equipped for the sophisticated analysis and interpretation of data, which should help the Literacy Collaborative both document its successes and determine its limitations.

Summary: Program Limitations

The primary limitation of Literacy Collaborative is its lack of a research base. While its design appears well conceived, there are no data to document its success or suggest areas where modification may be appropriate.

As with any schoolwide-restructuring model, the successful implementation of the Literacy Collaborative depends on teacher buy-in. While the intervention is balanced in the sense that it incorporates both phonics and a meaning-oriented emphasis, the Literacy Collaborative places a higher priority on meaning-oriented decoding and comprehension than it does on phonics and context-free decoding. Phonics-oriented schools may have a hard time adjusting.

Finally, because it depends on Reading Recovery to reach the students most at risk of not learning to read, schools with fairly limited numbers of these students may benefit more than schools with higher percentages of students in at-risk situations, simply because of the cost.

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Schoolwide Restructuring

What are schoolwide restructuring interventions?

Schoolwide restructuring interventions are complete reform packages that reshape schools from top to bottom, including all grades, all feature categories, and affect all members of the school community. The programs offer coherence in all classes in all grades within the school, ensuring consistency of instruction and easing the transitions between classes, grades, and activities.

What kinds of schoolwide restructuring interventions are available?

Drawing on Title I and more recently Comprehensive School Restructuring Demonstration (CSRD) grants, schoolwide-restructuring interventions have become popular recently. The CSRD program currently funds seventeen different schoolwide-restructuring models. Perhaps the two most well known models also happen to represent two very different approaches to schoolwide reform: Success For All and the Accelerated Schools Project. Both of these are reviewed in this section.

What proportion of students is served in schoolwide restructuring interventions?

All students in a school are served by these models, including pullout, special education, and gifted and talented students. Since all grades participate in these programs, students also participate in the programs throughout their elementary careers.

What kind of school might want to consider a schoolwide restructuring intervention?

Schoolwide restructuring interventions are radical overhauls of entire schools. Both expensive and time consuming, restructuring is an investment that requires full faculty coordination and several years of planning and implementing before they fully yield the benefits they promise. For this reason, schools already in good shape may not want or need to make this investment. On the other hand, for schools that are struggling to meet their goals for student achievement, or for schools with teachers using such divergent styles and philosophies that program cohesiveness is undermined, these restructuring programs offer comprehensive, research-based solutions to some of the most difficult problems.

Success For All

—By Jeffrey Bardzell

Program Summary

Success For All is a comprehensive school restructuring process designed for schools with large populations at risk for learning failure.

Success For All balances a skills-oriented instructional approach with a heavy emphasis on collaboration and teamwork among educators. It is a systematic intervention, with the structures explicitly in place, although teachers and schools have the opportunity to fill in the many gaps.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

Success For All is a schoolwide reform model, and as such its intended outcomes are diverse and comprehensive. Its stated goal is to ensure that all children succeed the first time. In the same vein, it aims to reduce retentions and referrals to special education.

Because it includes kindergarten (in some cases a full-day kindergarten) and provides systematic coverage of a broad range of reading skills in grades 1–3, the program is designed to affect emergent literacy, both types of decoding (context-free and meaning-oriented), and comprehension.

The program appears to have little in place to foster critical literacy, which is the interaction between comprehension of new content and metacognition, or the ability to organize and think about new ideas learned through reading.

Program Description

Among the reading interventions the Policy Center has studied, Success For All is the most comprehensive program available (see Figure 10).

This comprehensiveness has important implications. Schools must fully embrace the program, which is prepackaged at the national level. They must be willing and able to complete the training required to implement the program and to make it work in their local settings. If schools make that investment and implement the design, the program will look as follows.

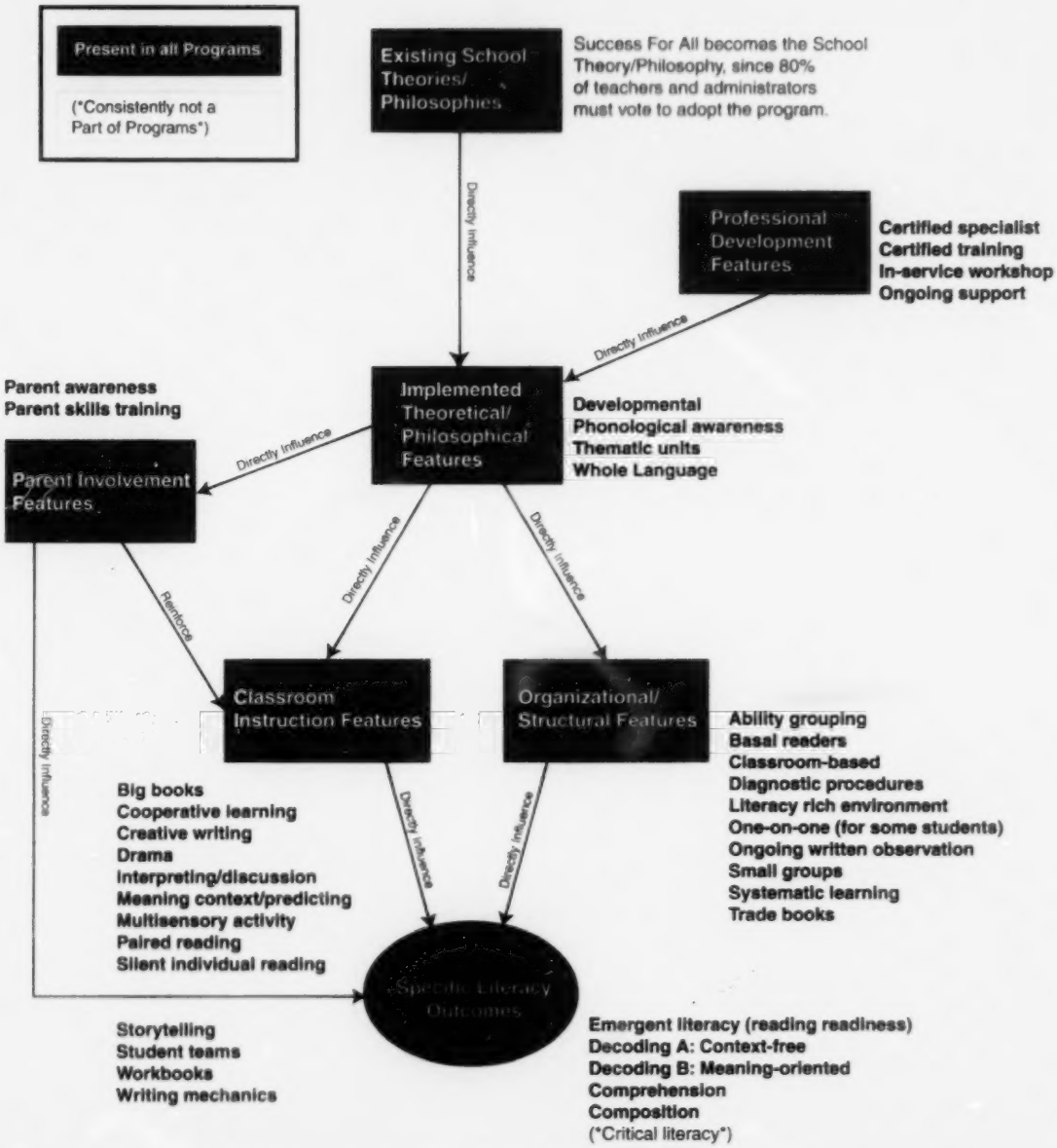
Organizational/Structural Features

The numerous structural features of Success For All enable the systematic coverage of a broad range of activities.

The small groups and ability grouping structures are designed to enable teachers to provide special customized instruction without relying too heavily on one-on-one instruction. One-on-one instruction is available, however, during first grade for those students struggling to succeed.

The literacy rich environment and trade books are included to foster a love of reading and to provide a meaning-oriented component that

Figure 10
Success For All Program Features



Success For All takes a comprehensive approach to reading instruction. A school restructuring model, it provides a curriculum complete with methods, materials, professional development, and a parent outreach program. The program has features designed to address every aspect of teaching elementary school children to read. It includes abundant instructional features supported by a large variety of structural features (e.g., small group instruction, diagnostics, measurement instruments, and basal readers). It is much more than a textbook adoption, with a sophisticated philosophical base and the means to help teachers implement that philosophy. The program even takes over the existing school philosophy and becomes the school culture. The advantage of Success For All's comprehensive design may also be its greatest disadvantage, as some feel that it is too prescriptive. However, for schools with high percentages of students at risk for learning failure, Success For All provides a method for meeting their needs.

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supplements some of the skills-oriented activities that are often used in context with basal readers.

Children in the program are carefully monitored with ongoing written observations, and regularly tested using diagnostic procedures so that the school communities know how effective instructional methods are.

Classroom Instruction Features

Too numerous to discuss fully, the features in this category range from workbooks and drills to creative writing and drama. Success For All is clearly designed with the idea that a great variety of activities is needed to ensure near-universal success. Accordingly, meaning-oriented and phonics-oriented instructional features are combined.

As a part of its intent to reach every child, the features also include multisensory approaches and an emphasis on writing. The idea is to keep children constantly engaged in literacy activities.

The lessons themselves are broken into short segments of 5–10 minutes each. Cooperative learning strategies are prevalent throughout the activities.

Professional Development Features

Professional development in Success For All is multi-tiered and ongoing. Certified specialists play a key role in getting the intervention initially implemented, and Success For All regularly sends specialists to evaluate implementations.

Ongoing certified training is available, as are national and regional conferences and workshops, in-service workshops, and regular staff meetings.

Parent Involvement Features

Success For All encourages parent involvement as well, which is consistent with its emphasis on collaboration. Parents receive training in reading to their children and in many cases the support of social services. The intervention also keeps parents aware of activities, subjects, and instructional methods going on in school.

Research Base

With sites throughout the country and an integrated data collection component, Success For All has demonstrated impact in many schools. It is particularly strong with the students most at risk of not succeeding in school. These students consistently show significant gains in context-free decoding and comprehension.

One concern is its effects on those students not in at-risk situations. Published studies suggest that gains for students not at risk are not as strong as those for at-risk students. Questions also remain about the long-term effectiveness of Success For All.

Nonetheless, the research indicates that Success For All is an effective intervention, especially in schools with high percentages of students in at-risk situations.

Summary: Program Strengths

For schools that have very high percentages of students at risk of not learning to read, a one-on-one pullout intervention may not be able to reach sufficient numbers of children. In such situations, a coherent classroom-wide approach is important. While other classwide interventions exist—e.g., Four Blocks Method and Literacy Collaborative—Success For All is the only intervention explicitly designed for such schools.

Success For All has a comprehensive and coherent design, with ample structures in place to ensure its success: professional development, ongoing student assessment, and regular site evaluations. The intervention is varied enough in its methods that all students, no matter how varied their individual needs, should have ample opportunities to learn.

One positive aspect of Success For All that gets only modest attention is the heavy emphasis it places on cooperative learning, both for students in the classroom and for the teachers. This emphasis should help students move beyond the skills taught in the lessons into authentic meaning- and communication-oriented experiences.

Summary: Program Limitations

Because it is a comprehensive schoolwide-restructuring model, Success For All is expensive. Schools that implement it have a monumental task of preparation, including training, materials acquisitions, and embracing new approaches.

Success For All's philosophical approaches themselves are not without controversy. Some critics complain that it is too skills-oriented. Many teachers may not accept this emphasis. For it to be effective, Success For All requires a substantial teacher buy-in. One reason for this resistance is that lesson plans are partially (though not completely) predetermined at the national level.

Some researchers continue to question the intervention's long-term effectiveness, especially for those students who are not in at-risk situations.

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Accelerated Schools Project

—By Kim Manoil

Program Summary

The Accelerated School Project [ASP] is a school-wide reform model that is based on the notion that students in at-risk situations must learn at an accelerated pace by offering enriched curricula and instruction similar to that used for gifted and talented students. In terms of outcomes, the program is designed to enable all students to perform at grade level by the end of sixth grade. Beyond the specification that all students should receive the enriched instruction typical of gifted and talented students, ASP does not specify instructional methods comprehensively or explicitly.

Rather, the ASP is designed primarily as an inquiry-based professional development model with a clearly articulated philosophical base, which encourages active and reflective experimentation and evaluation. This inquiry-based structure should enable school communities to find out over time more specifically what works best for all of the children in them. The process is guided through the implementation of three principles: unity of purpose, empowerment plus responsibility, and building on strengths.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

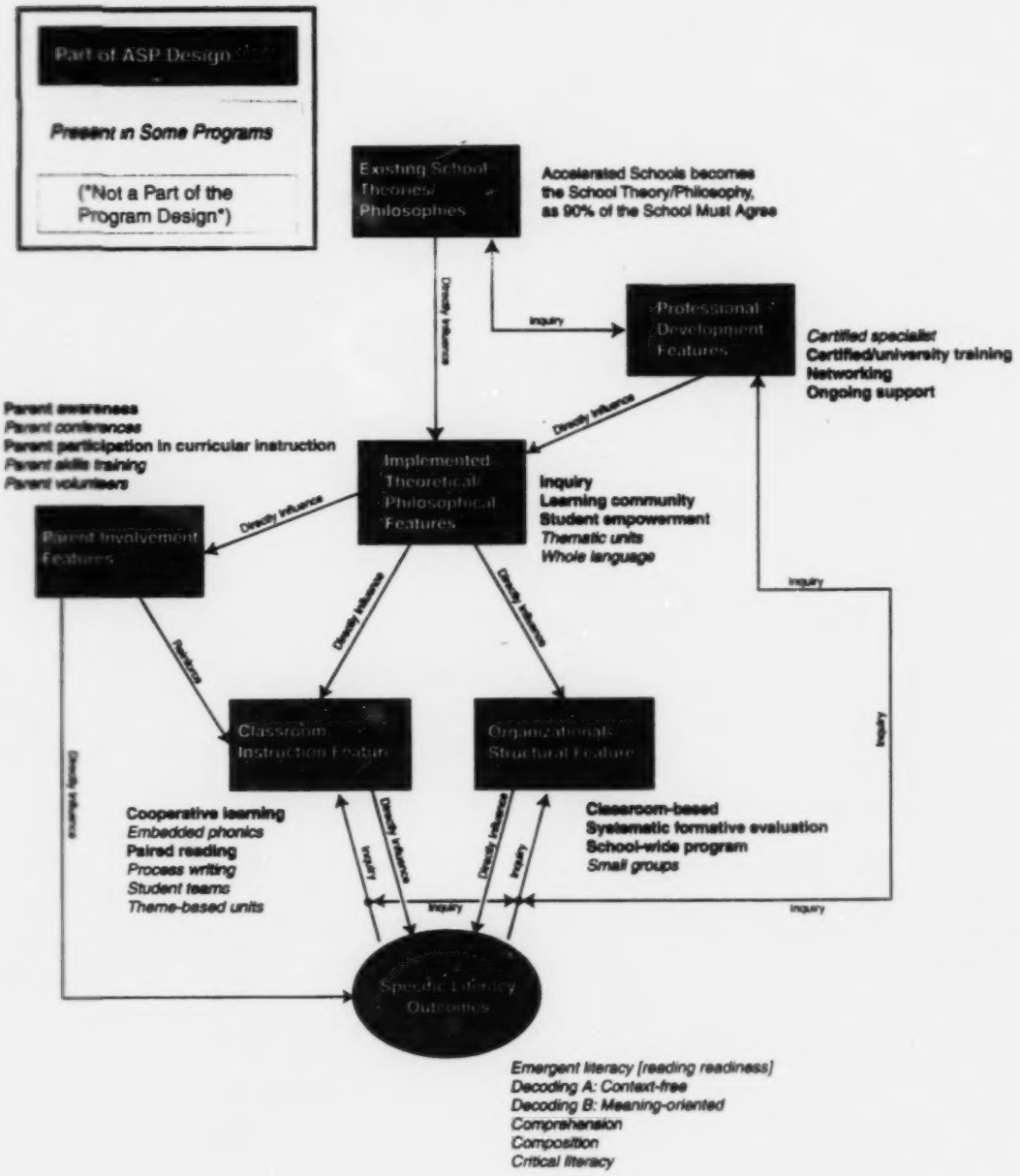
There is no specific literacy approach denoted by the Accelerated School Program. The program is based on a strong inquiry model in which individual schools evaluate their own needs and make changes accordingly. Since every school has a unique community of students, teachers, and parents, every Accelerated School should end up with a unique reading and literacy program. For this reason, the program in itself does not and cannot specifically target any of the literacy outcomes in particular: the process of identifying and targeting reading and literacy outcomes is left up to the individual schools. Targeted literacy outcomes are based on each school's process of "taking stock." In this process, the entire school community evaluates its present situation and creates a vision for what it wants to become. The areas that are identified for change are addressed through an inquiry process to analyze the areas and find the best solutions.

Program Description

The ASP is a school restructuring model that does not have a specific model for literacy instruction (see Figure 11). Again, it is difficult to explicate the specific literacy-related features of Accelerated Schools, because the program does not advocate any specific features. Instead, a process—carried out by school communities and shaped by Accelerated Schools principles—determines program features.

Nonetheless, some features appear to be more compatible with Acceler-

Figure 11
Accelerated Schools Project Program Features



Accelerated Schools are highly diverse in the features they implement. The restructuring model is centered on a complex, multi-layered inquiry process, through which the school determines the features it will implement. The process involves the entire school community, denoted by the dark shading of each of the feature category boxes, and yet it does not specify at the national level which literacy features to implement or which outcomes to target, which is why the lists of features beside the boxes are fairly short. Features denoted by italics illustrate the kinds of features some Accelerated Schools have chosen to implement.

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ated Schools principles and values than others. This allows one to speculate to an extent which features are likely to be found in a given Accelerated School. To a large extent, evidence supporting these speculations can be found in some of the Accelerated Schools research, in which descriptions provide some indication of which literacy-related features schools were using. Once again, there are limitations to the reliability of any generalizations of either improvements in outcomes or use of program features that relate to specific instantiations of literacy programs within Accelerated Schools.

Organizational/Structural Features

Accelerated Schools organizational and structural features clearly reflect its purpose as a school reform model. Its purpose is school-wide reform accomplished through a more enriched curriculum and instruction. This may include the use of more small group activities, including cross-age and heterogeneous (i.e., not ability) grouping. In addition, some studies made reference to the use of trade books, rather than "decodable" and/or basal books.

Classroom Instruction Features

Consistent with the focus on implementing more enriched teaching techniques, instructional features that emphasize student strengths, language development across subjects, problem-solving, and higher order thinking skills are encouraged. These may include the use of cooperative learning, student teams, and paired reading. One might infer the likely implementation of certain features (e.g., embedded phonics, theme-based units, process writing) due to their close alignment with Accelerated Schools principles, which emphasize that concepts should be taught in meaningful contexts, rather than abstractly.

Professional Development Features

Accelerated schools are required to create two faculty positions. A part-time coach is typically associated with the district office, the department of education, or a university and provides training and ongoing technical support for the implementation of the model. A facilitator is typically a member of the school staff and assists the coach in this process. A core team (the principal, coach, and facilitator) from the school receives pre-service training from the developer's headquarters at Stanford University or one of the satellite centers. The coach also provides training and ongoing support for the entire school. In summary, ASP professional development features include ongoing support, in-service workshops, university training, and networking.

Parent Involvement Features

Involvement of the parents is central to the Accelerated Schools philosophy. Parent awareness is emphasized when parents are expected to agree to a statement that identifies the school's goals and responsibilities of parents, students, and staff. As part of the inquiry process, parents are encouraged to participate in task forces or committees to work with the school in its decision making, which constitutes the feature parent participation in curricular instruction.

Research Base

Research on the effectiveness of the Accelerated School Project is not easy to generalize. It is difficult to summarize the impact ASP has had on schools largely because very few studies describe in detail the language arts curriculum implemented in the school, making it difficult to link program features to outcomes. Further, since every accelerated school develops a unique curriculum, generalizing its program features into a package of "best practices" with empirically demonstrated links to specific outcomes misses the point of ASP. This does not mean, however, that ASP research is without value.

In general, research reveals positive impacts on students in Accelerated Schools in many areas of achievement on standardized tests (reading, writing, language, and mathematics), though this achievement varies both by study and by grade. Some studies also looked beyond achievement tests, finding improved school climate, increased parent involvement, improved student behavior, and so forth. These results varied greatly by school, however, and many of the improvements grew more marked as time went on, with comparatively little change in the first year of implementation.

Summary: Program Strengths

The Accelerated Schools Project is a well designed school-restructuring model that allows for each school to take responsibility in identifying solutions unique to its areas of concern. This allows the school to create changes based on its specific needs rather than implementing a pre-packaged program that may address areas that do not need change and neglect areas that may be in need

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of change. The inquiry process and school-site decision making creates a sense of unity and ownership throughout the school community, which creates a stronger, more positive learning environment.

The focus on strengths also adds to the positive climate of the school for students, staff, and parents. Starting with what students and staff can already do provides a basis for further growth of individual students and the school as a whole.

Summary: Program Limitations

The Accelerated Schools Program is not designed as a literacy intervention per se. Instead, it is a school-wide approach to rethinking the entire curriculum, educational philosophies, and the needs of students in the school. This individualized process obviously precludes a standard implementation of instructional strategies across schools. While this customization allows the needs of each individual school to be addressed, it hinders development of confirmatory research drawn from multiple schools. Even if the unique literacy strategies of a school are shown to improve students' performance, the individualized nature of Accelerated Schools precludes another school from simply implementing the same features of a successful ASP school.

In addition, educational decision-makers should be aware that Accelerated Schools tend to take several years before consistent improvement may be realized. ASP requires a major time investment, and one whose emphasis on experimentation over prescribed packages of features may require several years before teachers can identify what works and what needs improvement.

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Teacher Inquiry Models

What are teacher inquiry models?

Teacher inquiry models are programs that set up systematic, structured processes of inquiry. Inquiry is an iterative process that involves taking stock of the existing situation, conducting relevant research, collectively proposing and approving changes, implementing new practices, critically assessing their effects, making adjustments, and so forth. In it, teachers are professionals and equals, taking accountability for and charge of their schools.

What kinds of teacher inquiry models are available?

There are several models available, including those that are a part of other programs, such as Accelerated Schools. In this chapter, we discuss two such models: Writer's and Reader's Workshops and Teacher Inquiry. The latter is driven by professional development and makes comparatively fewer specifications about instructional or organizational features, leaving these up to the teachers. The former approach is a classroom instruction model that incorporates teacher inquiry.

What proportion of students is served by teacher inquiry models?

Teacher inquiry is focused primarily on the teachers, rather than the students, so while it affects all students in a school, it typically does so indirectly.

What kind of school might want to consider a teacher inquiry model?

Teacher inquiry is designed to help schools learn about and implement new ideas. For this reason, any school undergoing any type of change—in population, in curriculum, by adopting an intervention, etc.—could benefit from teacher inquiry.

Teacher Inquiry

—By Mitzi Lewison,
Language Education Department, Indiana University

Program Summary

Teacher inquiry is not a single program, but rather is a broad, generally agreed upon set of insider research practices that promote teachers taking a close, critical look at their teaching and the academic and social development of their students. The goal of teacher inquiry is to build teachers' and schools' capacities to understand and solve problems of teaching and learning.

Although known by many names—teacher research, action research, practitioner research, insider research—teacher inquiry involves classroom teachers in a cycle of inquiry, reflection, and action. In this cycle, teachers question common practice, approach problems from new perspectives, consider research and evidence to propose new solutions, implement these solutions, and evaluate the results, starting the cycle anew.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

Teacher inquiry emphasizes emergent literacy, comprehension, and composition. The theoretical underpinnings of this model focus on classroom features and outcomes that focus on more holistic, child-centered literacy interventions. There are also some instances of decoding B and critical literacy outcomes in the research studies.

In addition to these outcomes, there is also an emphasis on experimenting with strategies that increase student motivation to read and write. That is, teacher inquirers also seek to improve affective outcomes—attitudes toward reading, motivation, and lifelong habitual reading.

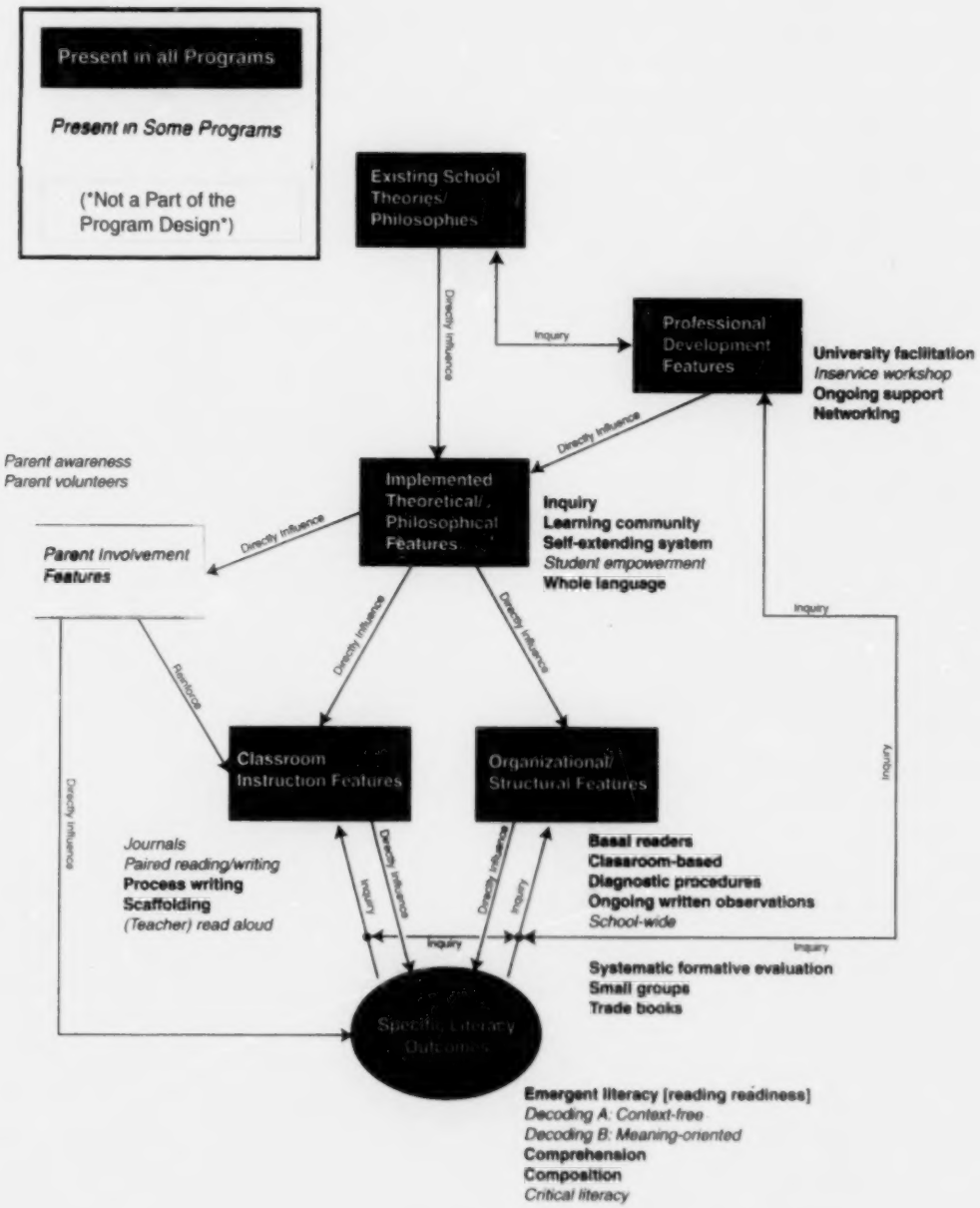
Program Description

Teacher inquiry is essentially a professional development model that does not in itself specify classroom activity (see Figure 12). As such, it is somewhat different than many of the other models in this review, and therefore the application of our framework needs minor adjustment. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on what is embedded formally in the model, I describe program features that are typically found in schools that implement teacher inquiry, as reported in the studies.

Organizational/Structural Features

Despite the tremendous variability in teacher inquiry studies, there is overwhelmingly common agreement on a set of structural features that underlie this form of teacher research. In classroom inquiry, teachers systematically study either individual children, a specific curriculum component, or their own teaching. All classroom inquiry starts with teachers posing questions about one of these three areas. The process involves close observation, data collection, data analysis, reflection, and taking some type of action.

Figure 12
Teacher Inquiry Program Features



Teacher Inquiry, much like Accelerated Schools and many programs that are centered on inquiry processes, covers the school community fairly comprehensively, and yet has relatively few specific features prescribed. The intent of these programs is to tighten and make more coherent the links between features in different categories. The inquiry process is denoted in the figure by the inquiry lines connecting several feature categories and outcomes. The tendency of teacher inquiry to lean toward a whole language philosophy is reflected in several of the features and outcomes.

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Teachers are involved in a continuing cycle of inquiry, which includes planning, implementing, and evaluating literacy interventions.

The specific tools of teacher inquiry are varied and include interviews, oral histories, surveys, questionnaires, observation checklists, rating scales, observation journals, student artifacts, audiotape recordings, transcripts of student dialogue, and photographs. Data analysis is usually qualitative, although this analysis is often supplemented with quantitative data, and can be used in either ongoing informal analysis or formal analysis in published reports.

Classroom Instruction Features

Even though there is wide variability in teacher inquiry studies, three classroom components were present in nearly all of the investigations. First, reader's and/or writer's workshops were extremely prevalent features of these classrooms. Second, there was also a strong focus on teacher demonstrations, modeling, or direct instruction related to the focus of the inquiry (i.e., demonstrations on how students organize content they've learned from reading, student misconceptions, keeping portfolios, conducting literature discussions, and goal-setting for reading and writing). Third, skills were almost exclusively taught in the context of authentic literacy activities.

In some of the studies there were daily read-aloud times (often more than once during the day), the use of a variety of text beyond basal readers or children's literature, and explicit extra support for struggling readers.

Professional Development Features

Teacher inquiry programs are founded on the belief that the most effective teacher inquiry takes place when teachers regularly meet with other teacher researchers and create a community of practice. There are some cases where individual teachers have read professional articles and books that have served as new lenses from which to question and research their practice, but in general, working with other teachers and a facilitator is preferable. Most commonly, teachers meet with a consultant, teacher leader, or professor on a regular basis to share their classroom inquiries and to learn more about data collection, analysis, and conducting research. These meetings can take the form of teacher study groups, support groups, or even university classes.

Parental Involvement Features

Although not necessarily a part of teacher inquiry, over half of the studies included parent components. Parents volunteered at the request of teachers, were involved in classroom activities with their children, helped out at home on specific assignments, or completed surveys to assist classroom teachers in better understanding how to work with their children.

Research Base

The research base for teacher inquiry is made up of studies that are generally qualitative or ethnographic in nature. This type of research does not try to make claims that are generalizable or based on objective, context independent research methods. Instead, teacher inquiry is directed at the subjective, lived-experience of teachers and students. The goal for

teacher inquiry is the generation of useful information that, first of all, informs teachers of more effective ways to work with their students, and secondly, contributes to the professional knowledge base.

Thus, one of the greatest contributions of this research is its thick description of classroom environments, children's literacy development, specific interventions, and the teacher's role—all of which can be of great assistance to schools and classroom teachers concerned about student achievement in reading and writing. Teacher inquiry allows us to see classrooms, teachers, and students in real-world, genuine ways. The elaborate descriptions of teacher inquiry projects have the potential to provide a rich source of information that may be even more helpful to a teacher with struggling readers and writers than statistical data gleaned from large groups of children.

Summary: Program Strengths

The strength of this program is clearly the combination of teachers, research, reflection, evaluation, and experimentation taking place as a structured community effort. Teachers are not only viewed as professionals in the model, but they are also given opportunity to use that professionalism for the betterment of their schools. There are several positive consequences: teachers become better teachers, better informed about best practices and also more attuned to their individual children, and they become both more focused on and have more effective strategies for helping struggling learners.

In this way, nationally significant research and best practices can be enlisted to improve schools by the people who know their children,

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strengths, and problem areas the best: local teachers. This enlistment is possible because of the iterative nature of teacher inquiry, which ensures that research and nationally (and even internationally) constructed intervention packages actually make sense in and are successful in individual schools. Teachers critique these packages, evaluating how well the packages fit into their individual schools, and they identify the children not succeeding within the packages and try to find other means of reaching those children. In other words, all national packages have an inherent "one size fits all" aspect to them; teacher inquiry enables schools to overcome this limitation and optimize instruction to fit the school.

Summary: Program Limitations

Professional development does not directly affect learning outcomes, but rather does so by changing implemented school philosophy, classroom practices, and so forth. Where it appears to be strongest, in terms of outcomes, is in its improvement of literacy attitudes and motivation. It would be unreasonable, then, to expect that standardized test scores will jump the year after teacher inquiry is adopted. Not only does it affect outcomes indirectly, but it becomes more effective over time, as teachers have an opportunity to turn research into changes in practice, a process that needs continual evaluation and adjustment.

Also, since teacher inquiry does not specify any particular literacy curriculum or classroom organization, schools needing or desiring large-scale changes/reforms will have to look elsewhere for models.

Reader's and Writer's Workshops

—By Amy Flint,
Language Education Department, Indiana University

Program Summary

Reader's and writer's workshops are process- and strategy-oriented approaches that build on a whole language philosophy of stressing social interactions with peers and meaningful texts. Students engage in varied reading and composition activities. At the heart of the workshop is the premise that children learn to read and write by reading and writing authentic and meaningful texts.

During writer's workshop, children compose individual and collaborative pieces in a structure that allows them to work with others, experiment with texts, and explore various options in their writing. Reader's workshops focus on children's efforts to use strategies to make sense of and think about texts. In both workshop approaches, activities are chosen and led by students, supplemented with mini-lessons and one-on-one or small group interaction with the teacher.

Targeted Literacy Outcomes

Due to the inherent flexibility of an approach that provides interactions with classmates and texts, outcomes will vary. Reader's and writer's workshops are implemented in elementary grades through high school.

Comprehension and critical literacy are the focus in many reader's workshop classrooms. Children are encouraged to reflect and respond to various aspects of the texts. Book talks and discussions support children's understandings and connections made to other texts.

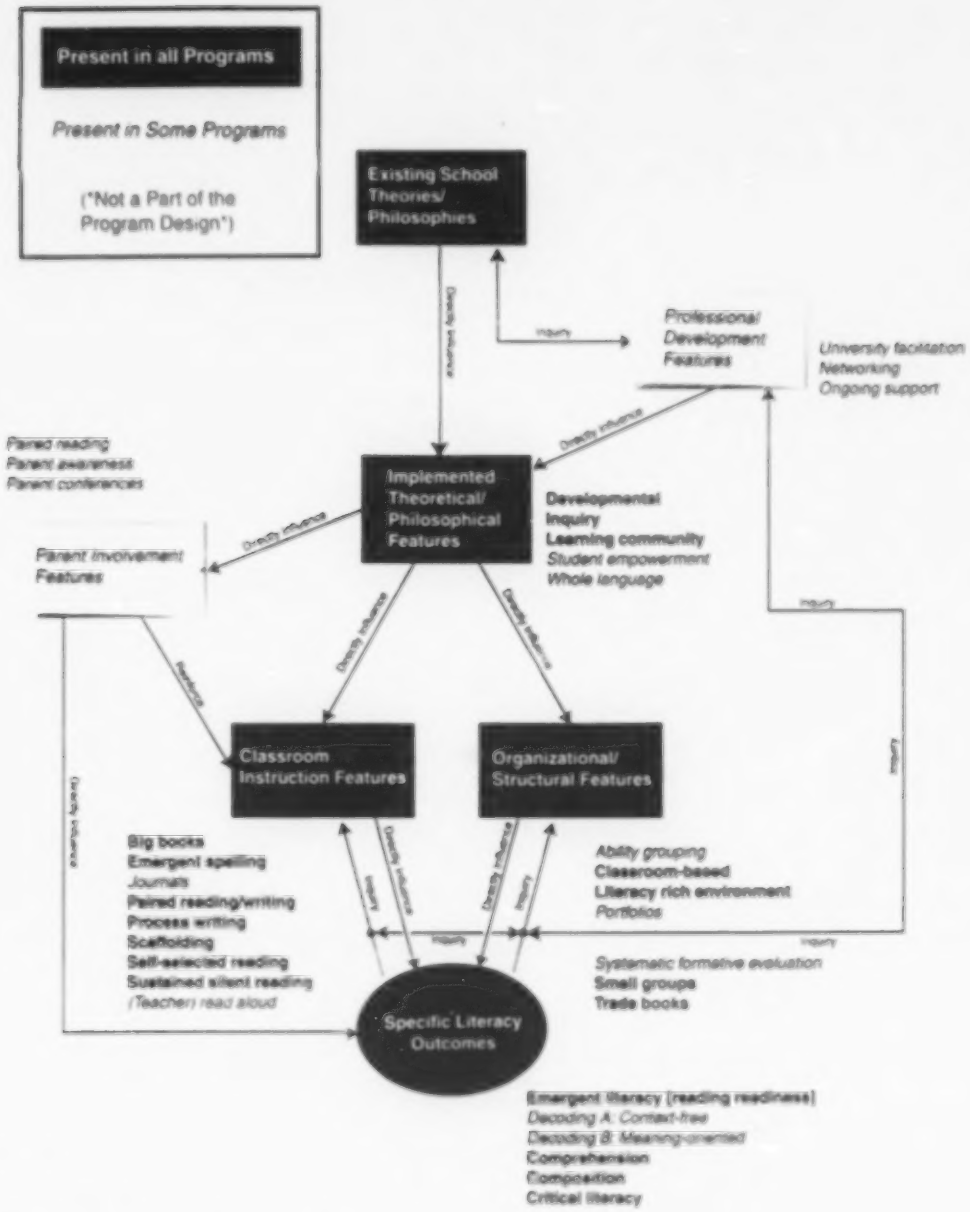
Composition is highly developed through writer's workshop. The workshop encourages children to use a process approach for writing (i.e., a broad range of strategies that encourage extended time spent on drafting, multiple revisions, and time for reflection and further revision). To the degree that writing is a form of expression representing one among many possible perspectives and intentions, critical literacy is also fostered.

In addition to these three outcomes—composition, comprehension, and critical literacy, around which the program is designed—reader's and writer's workshops also affect the other major outcomes: emergent literacy and decoding A and B. Targeted emergent literacy behaviors include concepts of print, story structure, and book awareness. Phonemic awareness is targeted through an emergent-spelling component. Decoding A and B are developed through instruction in multiple cueing systems.

Program Description

Reader's and writer's workshops are flexible approaches that strongly emphasize child empowerment and interest (see Figure 13). Robust

Figure 13
Reader's and Writer's Workshops Program Features



Writer's and Reader's Workshops constitute an inquiry model that focuses more specifically on reading and literacy than the other ones covered in this Guide. Thus, while the Workshops figure resembles those of Accelerated Schools and Teacher Inquiry, it includes more features specific to reading instruction. Consistent with a contemporary whole language approach, the Workshops balance both direct instruction and plenty of individual or group practice in reading meaningful and interesting books.

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comprehension, critical reflection, and disciplined self-expression characterize many of the activities. The activities that demand and develop these capacities are highly varied, both in instructional technique and structural organization. The coherent implementation of these variable features is supported by a strong set of implemented philosophies, which are themselves often supported by an ongoing professional development program.

Organizational/Structural Features

A key organizational feature of reader's and writer's workshop approaches is flexibility. The materials used, space for learning and teaching, time spent in various activities, and the grouping patterns of students are dependent on the identified needs of students. Self-selected reading and writing is a key instructional feature, and several organizational features support it, including a literacy-rich environment, a strong and varied classroom library, and many varieties of materials, including writing instruments and kinds of paper. A large sustained silent reading block is a part of each week's activities.

Collaborating and conferencing with peers and teachers enable workshop participants to share their experiences and understandings. Students are often paired and assembled in small groups to address a common problem area with a targeted mini-lesson. In addition, children are also encouraged to collaborate with each other on specific projects and activities.

The workshops approach also includes ongoing alternative assessment, such as portfolios, anecdotal records, checklists, tape recordings, field notes, and so forth. These assessment methods are intended to provide more holistic feedback than conventional measures.

Classroom Instruction Features

Classroom instruction features are intended to allow multiple and flexible paths to rich and holistic literacy experiences. Many classes alternate between brief mini-lessons (in which a skill is taught and/or modeled using direct instruction) and conferencing, in which children are at work alone, in pairs, or in groups on reading or writing projects with teachers moving about the room working with the children. In these conferences, children interact both with texts and other people, using many features—big books, trade books, journal writing, interpretive discussion, etc.—in combination to access meaning and understand its relevance in the class community.

Professional Development Features

Professional development is in concert with the National Writing Project. This model of professional development is based on the idea of teachers teaching teachers. Teachers come together during summer institutes to discuss exemplary practices and strategies, teaching, and the complexities of writing.

Teachers then assume consultant/mentoring roles in their schools over the course of the school year. In addition to sharing successes and tensions with teaching writing, the teachers also write on a range of topics and in various forms, going through editing and revision processes together. In addition, teachers

read, discuss, and write about significant research in the field.

Parental Involvement Features

While the workshops do not explicitly specify a formal parent involvement component, schools generally ask parents to read with their children (a variant of paired reading), often from the same books covered at school. Teachers often send home samples of writing for parents to read and respond to. Parent conferences are held regularly, where students' portfolios for reading and writing are shared.

Research Base

Writer's and reader's workshops approaches have a solid and diverse research base, including both quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative studies have found that classrooms with reader's and writer's workshops perform at least as well as the skills-oriented classrooms they were compared to, exceeding these skills-based classrooms in certain skills, such as spelling. Studies also showed that the use of invented spelling helped develop phonemic awareness.

One key finding from the research was that affective results were more significant than cognitive behaviors. One study revealed that literacy development was accomplished in both the whole-language and skills-based classrooms, but children in the whole language classrooms were able to assume literacy behaviors, including reflecting, explaining, responding, and valuing; while the skills-based children remained on literacy skills, such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and decoding.

The confidence and self-monitoring abilities of the students in the reader's and writer's workshop approaches also increased significantly. Qualitative studies revealed that young writers in these approaches use writing to position themselves in relation to their peers and the social contexts in which they live.

Summary: Program Strengths

Reader's and writer's workshops are good examples of how whole language philosophies can be implemented in balanced classroom practice. The approach makes use of direct instruction of specific skills without compromising its emphasis on meaning making, critical reflection, and purposive self-expression. Structurally, the program's flexibility provides the necessary conditions for teachers to create a constructive iterative cycle between meaningful activities and projects and close observation, or "kid watching." That the program is backed by a solid theoretical grounding and often ongoing professional development also helps ensure the coherence of this iterative process.

Writer's and reader's workshops are also fine examples of converting Vygotskian developmental theory into classroom practice. The program takes full advantage of the Vygotskian principle that children can often do things as a part of groups that they cannot do alone. The multi-tiered social organization—which includes voluntary pairing and small groups, brief sessions of ability grouping, and one-on-one interaction with a teacher—should promote the emergence of sophisticated interpretive and expressive capabilities, in addition to the improved attitudes toward literacy found in the research.

Summary: Program Limitations

An inherent potentially negative consequence of any program that does not prescribe a curriculum or a specific teaching sequence (e.g., Success for All and Reading Recovery, respectively) is that the program becomes more dependent on factors external to program design, e.g., teacher quality, class size, book availability, etc. Writer's and reader's workshops rely heavily on teacher judgment, which itself in this program should be based both on a solid understanding of the whole language theories that inform it and careful observation of the children. The quality and consistency of implementation of these workshops may depend in large part on the extent that the theories are available to and understood by teachers, as well as the extent of relevant professional development available in support of these theories.

Similarly, the lack of a standard parent involvement component also represents a potential problem area. While it is evident that many schools involve parents, the lack of a specific component within the design itself puts the responsibility on schools to design an appropriate parent involvement component.

Finally, even if schools ensure solid ongoing professional development (such as through participation in the National Writing Project) and a parent participation component, the open-endedness of the design could result in varied results for different schools.

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Part II. A Guide for Practice

Clearly there is a wide range of alternative approaches to early reading and literacy intervention available to elementary schools. The reviews in Part I point to the range of choices, but Part I is not comprehensive. Educators who are considering interventions need to recognize that there are far more options available to them than we have reviewed. Nevertheless, this can inform local efforts to plan for early interventions. Part II provides guidance for schools considering intervention options.

The processes of assessing the early literacy challenge, defining a new direction or vision, and selecting an intervention method are decision processes. They should involve teachers and administrators as well as input from parents. Ideally a group of teachers and parents could work together, as a team, to assess the early literacy challenge they face.

Assessing Current Practice

Increasingly, elementary schools are competing in an environment that emphasizes the educational "bottom line": how well the school compares to other similar schools. Most states use some type of standardized testing to compare schools. Many have high-stakes testing for children, requiring passes on standardized tests for promotion or graduation. Some states provide "report cards" to parents that compare schools to similar schools. And most states have a policy that encourages or requires schools to change their curricula if they have poor educational outcomes. In this context, it is important to start with consideration of educational outcomes. However, this is only a start. It is also important to consider current educational practices—the features of the current early reading and literacy program—and challenges facing early primary teachers as they think about improving their early literacy programs. Therefore, we suggest three steps in assessing a school's early literacy program. (See the box: "Who Should Plan the Reform".)

Step 1: Assess Educational Outcomes

When thinking about whether to undertake an intervention in early reading and literacy, it is important to start with an analysis of two types of outcomes: measures of attainment/opportunity (retention and special educa-

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tion identification) and measures of early reading achievement (first through fourth grades).

Opportunity to Achieve

When schools have large percentages of students who are referred to special education or who are retained in grades K-3, this could be an indicator of problems with the fit between the schools' literacy programs and the learning needs of children in the school. However, since the percentages of students who are retained in schools is influenced by the extent of poverty (or percentage on free lunch) and the types of locale (with urban and rural schools usually facing the largest challenge), it is important that educators consider "similar" schools when assessing outcomes. The schools used for comparison should have similar rates of poverty and be in similar locale types within the same state. Therefore, when beginning an assessment of the need for early reading intervention, it is important to ask:

- What percentage of students in grades K-3 were identified as having learning disabilities? (Consider the past three years at a minimum.)
- How does this percentage compare to similar schools in the state? (Consider schools with similar poverty rates and in similar locale types.)
- What percentage of students in grades K-3 were retained in grade level? (Again, consider at least three years.)
- How does this percentage compare to other similar schools?

When the answers to these questions are compiled, the school will have an indication of the extent of the

Who Should Plan the Reform?

In Indiana, as in most states, school corporations (or school districts in other states) have historically played a central role in planning curriculum reforms. There are good reasons for this. For example, low-achieving students move frequently and should be able to work with the same materials and approaches in schools within the same corporation. With transfer policies negotiated by many school corporations, teachers also move from school to school. Professional development can be offered to all teachers (say, all kindergarten teachers) at one time. When school corporations decide that reading is important, they can provide funding for professional development, skill materials, and books and other print materials for voluntary reading.

At the same time, many of the new reform efforts emphasize school-wide efforts and site based choices about strategies. In particular, the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program emphasizes local buy-in. Some states are using a similar approach in their efforts to implement the *Reading Excellence Act*. Given these new developments, we have written this *Guide* to inform schools about their choices. However, it is important for educators in schools to recognize that school corporations have a role to play. We recommend close communication with curriculum officials in school corporations in efforts to develop an early reading and literacy intervention.

School corporations have an important role to play in the development of research-based programs. School corporations can facilitate and coordinate the assessment process in schools, providing information on comparable schools. They can also support professional development opportunities and networking among schools.

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early reading and literacy challenge it faces. If both of these indicators are below the average for similar schools, then the school has a strong program and a major restructuring may not be needed. There may be reason, however, to consider making refinements to the current program.

If the school is close to the average for similar schools on these indicators, then there is room for intervention. These schools may have a sound basic program, but may want to consider implementing interventions that provide opportunities for more children to read on grade level at the end of third grade.

Finally, schools that have high percentages of students who are retained or who are referred to special education may want to consider a new classroom-wide approach to early literacy improvement or schoolwide restructuring methodology.

Reading Achievement

Standardized tests provide another indicator of early reading achievement. It is important, however, to consider how well low-achieving students are doing compared to low-achieving students at similar schools as well as compared to the school average. Schools contemplating an intervention in early reading should consider the following questions:

- What is the school's average score on the state's test of early reading (i.e., state-mandated tests for grades 1-4)?
- How do these scores compare to similar schools (by locale type and level of poverty)?
- What is the average for the lowest 20 percent of children taking the state's reading tests?
- How does the score for the lowest 20 percent compare to similar schools?

Test scores provide an indication of how well students are learning to read, while the opportunity indicators (i.e., retention and special education referral) provide evidence of whether students are learning to read. Thus, it is possible for a school to have high scores and high failure. If this is the case, some type of change may be needed. If the lowest twenty percent are low, but not the overall average, then a school may want to consider Reading Recovery or some other type of pullout.

If scores are high and both referral and retention are low compared to similar schools, the early literacy program is probably working well. There may be reason to continue with the assessment, in order to reflect on where the school is now and how it can further improve. However, the goal for these schools is excellence! Teachers still may want to consider inquiry-based approaches that add to their professional development and to the learning opportunities (i.e., breadth and depth of student experience).

Finally, if schools have low scores and are high on special education identification and within-grade retention compared to similar schools, they face fundamental challenges. They should consider more substantial restructuring methods. Classroom-wide methods may be appropriate if the problem is reading and not math. If both indicators are problematic, the school may decide to seriously consider schoolwide restructuring.

Step 2: Assess the Features of the Current Program

While consideration of educational outcomes may provide visibility into the extent of the literacy challenge facing an elementary school, it provides little insight into the specific nature of the problem. To gain insight into the reasons for the challenge, it is important to build an understanding of the features of the current early reading and literacy program. We have attached a survey instrument that can be used to assess current practice (Appendix A). We suggest the following steps:

- All teachers and specialists who teach reading to students in grades K-3 should complete the survey.
- Tabulate the results: How did the teachers at each grade level respond?
- Analyze results: What were the similarities and differences in responses to the questions within grade levels and/or across grade level?

The survey results provide a data resource that can be used in planning, and we provide further guidance for working with the survey results in the remainder of this *Guide*. However, as part of the initial analysis, it is important to consider:

- Are most early primary teachers using similar approaches in their reading and literacy instruction?
- Is a coherent approach evident across grade levels in the early reading and literacy program?
- Is the philosophy of teachers reflected in the classrooms?
- Is the approach balanced?
- Does it reflect strong systematic methods and a literature rich approach?

Positive answers to these questions suggest cohesiveness in the early reading and literacy program. If these schools have problems with educational outcomes, then they may want to change the entire system—to try classroom-wide or school-wide methods. However, if there is great variation, there is reason to dig deeper, to consider how outcomes in classrooms are related to the methods used in classrooms. It is important for those who are engaged in the process to use an open and respectful process.

Step 3: Identify Critical Challenges

Based on a review of these two data sources, it is possible to gain insight into the nature and extent of the literacy challenges facing an elementary school. (See the box, "Indiana's Balanced Approach.") This type of assessment provides information on the nature of the challenge facing the school. At this stage the study team should consider:

- Are small refinements or large-scale changes needed?
- Who should review the assessment results?
- Who should be involved in the next phase of planning?

This first stage of assessment can provide an indication of the nature of the problem, but it offers no solutions. Indeed, it is appropriate to get a sense for the extent of the challenge and to build an understanding of the types of changes that make sense for the school as a whole, before considering specific interventions.

Setting a New Direction

Planning for early reading and literacy intervention is appropriately viewed as a process that can build a consensus about the direction a

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school might take. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges schools face in deciding on an intervention strategy is to choose a strategy that fits the school and has the support of teachers in the school. Therefore, it is important to have an open process of decision making and discussion that involves teachers in reflecting on their classrooms, as well as the changes in their classrooms likely to result from interventions. If this process is approached in an open way that encourages communication about concerns facing teachers, parents, and children, then it is possible to build consensus about taking a new path in the early reading and literacy program. A suggested strategy is outlined below.

Step 1: Build an Understanding of the School's Philosophy

It is important that the school community consider the implemented philosophy of early reading and literacy. To get started, we suggest that the planning group reconsider the responses to the questions in Part III of the Early Literacy Intervention Classroom Survey. Each of these questions is presented as a continuum. They should reflect on the extent to which their classrooms:

- Are teacher-directed or student-directed,
- Are child centered/developmental or prescribed/systematic,
- Are code/phoneme or meaning/comprehension oriented,
- Teach code/phonemes outside or inside of context.

The responses to these questions provide insights into the extent to which the school's early reading and literacy program is situated in a phonics tradition, a literature-rich tradition, or a balanced approach. Responses that are closer to teacher-directed, prescribed/systematic, code/phoneme oriented, and teaching code/phonemes outside of context, are more oriented toward the phonics tradition. The closer responses are to being student-directed, child-centered, meaning/comprehension oriented and teaching code/phonemes within context, the closer they are to the whole language tradition. Responses that are in the middle indicate balance. It is important to consider:

- Is there a consistent philosophy used within grades? Within grades K-3?
- Is there a tendency toward phonics, literature rich, or balance?
- Is there a diversity of philosophies in use?

Understanding the school's philosophy provides a starting point for its planning process. The answers to these questions provide a critical source of information for making decisions about the intervention strategies. The answers will provide insight into whether there is a consensus in the school. If a school has respectable educational outcomes in relation to similar schools and a consistent philosophy, there may be no reason to change.

Current thinking—and a growing body of research—seems to favor using a balanced approach. If a school relies more strongly on one philosophy (e.g., whole language or phonics) than the other and has poor educational outcomes, there may be a need to have an open discussion about the approach being used. In these cases it may be appropriate to consider moving toward a balanced approach. The advantage of this

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transition might be that it helps the school build a consensus. However, these questions relate to very basic values and beliefs held by educators and it is not desirable to try to force uniformity.

If the teachers in a school have diverse philosophies and students rate high on educational outcomes, school leaders are probably doing a good job assigning students to teachers whose philosophies match the students' learning styles. Certainly if a school finds itself in this situation, then the early primary teachers might want to share their insights about these issues.

Step 2: Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

The second step in the planning process should focus on strengths and weaknesses of the current approach. This involves getting into more depth about the program features related to structural/organizational (Part II.A) and classroom instruction (Part II.B). First review the results of the survey:

- What are the frequently and infrequently used structural/ organizational features?
- What are the frequently and infrequently used instructional features?
- How well are the structural/ organizational and instructional features aligned with philosophies used in the classrooms? (Individual teachers may want to reflect on this question for their own classrooms.)

Reflection on these questions provides an opportunity for teachers to consider their own values and practices in relation to each other. Ideally, the option of choosing an approach to improve the early literacy program should provide a chance for teachers to think about the strengths and

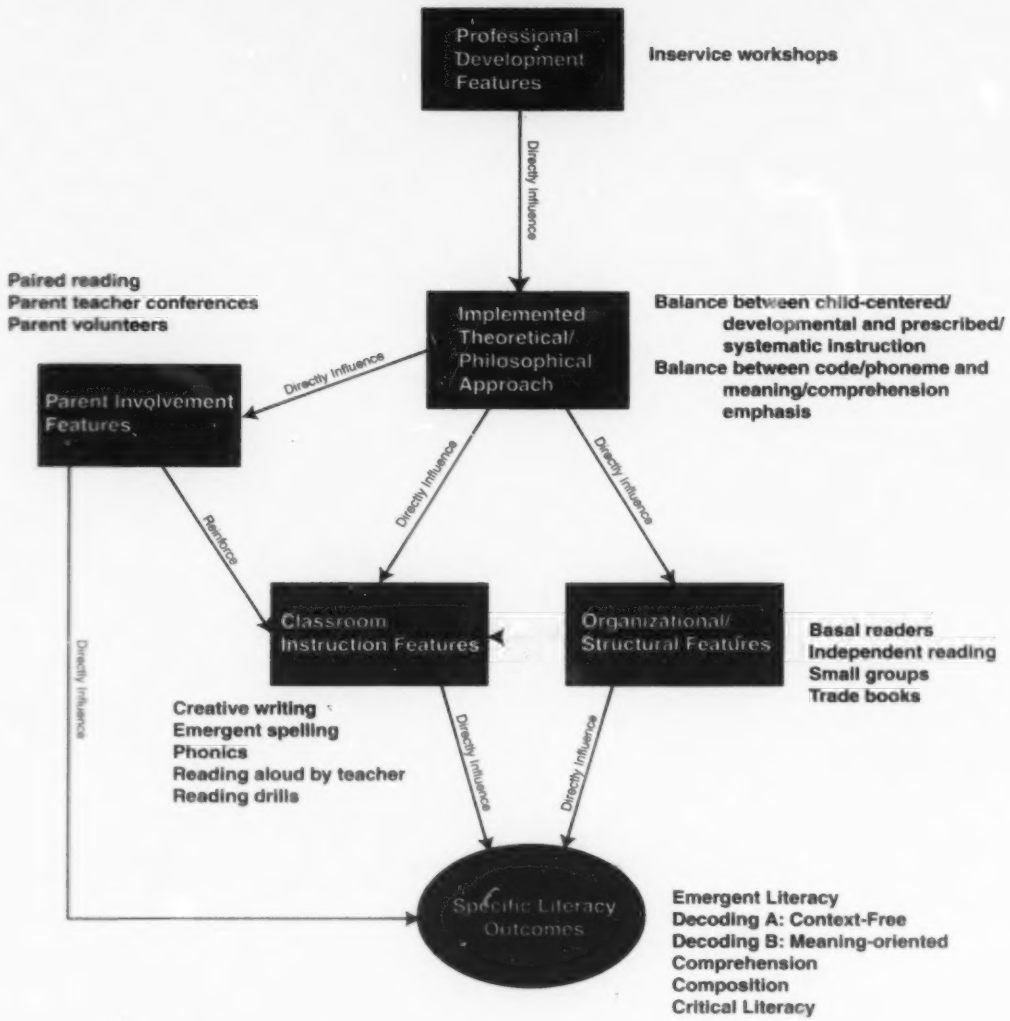
Indiana's Balanced Approach

A recent study of Indiana's elementary schools reveals that the schools in the state are using a balanced approach to reading. A survey (a more detailed version of the appended example) was sent to schools funded by the State's Early Literacy Grant Program (i.e., Reading Recovery and Other Early Literacy Interventions) and to a random sample of all schools that were not funded. The random sample was used as a comparison.

Both the funded and comparison schools had a set of common features for classroom instruction organization/structure, which indicated a balanced approach to the daily instructional activities in schools. In addition, the average school indicated a balance between being child-centered and prescribed/systeamtic, and between emphasizing code/phoneme and meaning comprehension. However, professional development was generally limited to in-service workshops and parent involvement was generally limited to paired reading.

In Indiana, the typical school has a balanced curriculum, but has needs for on-going professional development. This approach is illustrated in figure 14. This graphic provides a good standard of comparison, as indicated in the figure (See Manset, G., St. John, E. P., Michael, R., Bardzell, J., Hodges, D., Jacobs, S., & Gordon, D. *Indiana's Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program: Impact Study for 1997–98*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Education Policy Center, 1999).

Figure 14
Indiana's Balanced Approach:
Summary findings from the 1997-98 ELIGP Survey



Each feature listed above is a part of the reading and literacy program in the average Indiana classroom.

Professional Development and Parent Component features:
Schools were asked to answer Yes or No for individual features. The inclusion of each feature in either of these categories indicates that more than half of respondents indicated Yes.

Classroom Instruction and Organizational/Structural features:
Respondents were asked to indicate frequency of use on a 5-point scale. Features listed here were used often to every day (mean between 4.0 [Often] and 5.0 [Every Day]).

Implemented Theoretical/Philosophical features:
Teachers were asked to indicate their philosophies on a 5-point scale, which forced them to decide between two opposing philosophies. Responses near the center (2.5 – 3.5) were considered balanced.

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weaknesses in their own classrooms. They may also want to consider the types of parent involvement that might be needed. They may want to consider:

- When are current classroom practices (structural/organizational and instructional) closely aligned with the implemented philosophy?
- When are the classroom practices incongruent with the implemented philosophy?
- Are some classroom practices used too frequently or infrequently?
- How are classroom practices related to the educational outcomes of students in the classroom?
- Are there other practices that might merit more widespread use? Are there practices that you would like to learn more about?
- How can families be more involved in the early reading and literacy program?

Once teachers have had a chance to reflect individually on these questions, they should have a conversation. Share reflections! Consider what the strengths and weaknesses of the program might be. Such a conversation will provide a basis of information about the early reading and literacy program that can inform choices about the specific types of interventions that merit consideration in the school.

Step 3: Identify Possible Approaches

With this background, it is possible to identify a few interventions that merit more serious consideration. At this stage teachers should review the summary reviews of the interventions described earlier, other reading sources related to the interventions that seem to be of interest, and other related interventions. As part of this review, they may want to consider:

- What interventions include the types of program features that the teachers would like to learn more about and try out?
- Which interventions are more consistent with the philosophies that predominate in the school (or that are desired, if there is agreement that change is needed)?

These questions should be openly discussed. Teachers should be encouraged to read more extensively about different methods when they have questions and to share their reflections on their reading. The key issue is to choose methods that make sense to the school. It is possible that a single approach will make sense. It is also possible that none of the available methods will make sense for the school. An examination of the results of the study of Indiana's Early Literacy Intervention Grant program (see box) may help inform these discussions.

Designing Interventions

If there is a consensus around a method, then it makes sense to proceed with the idea. This involves finding out where to get the professional development and other resources to try out the new method. However, if the school seeks to develop its own approach, it is time to start a more in-depth planning process. Ideally a planning team would be formed to plan an approach for the school.

Based on our research reviews, we have developed a set of criteria to guide the design of site-based inter-

ventions for early reading and literacy programs. A step-by-step process for designing a local, research based program is outlined below.

Step 1: Recognize the Complexity of Early Reading

- *Criterion 1: Reading demands and makes use of a remarkably diverse set of skills, experiences, and awarenesses. In addition to the well-documented importance of phonemic awareness and the ability to sound out unfamiliar words, children must have well-developed vocabularies, strong oral language comprehension, symbolic awareness, an ability to understand/translate between both local/family and standardized dialects, an awareness of different kinds of reading (i.e., genres, purposes, strategies), and an awareness of the social nature of reading.*

Using the assessment of educational outcomes, reconsider how well your school is doing on early reading and literacy:

- How well prepared are new students for learning to read? Do they enter school with emergent literacy skills? How well does the school help students develop these skills?
- How well does the school prepare children to decode texts?
- How well does the school prepare children to comprehend texts?
- How well does the school prepare children to compose texts in their early writing experiences?

The assessment of educational outcomes provides a baseline indicator of how well the school is doing on each of these outcomes. Using these results, teachers and administrators in a school need to think through the current program, to identify the outcomes that need to be improved. These outcomes should be the target of the intervention design.

Step 2: Use a Comprehensive, Balanced Approach

- *Criterion 2: Given the complexity of reading and the variation in home experiences that children bring to the classroom, sustained attention to all aspects of reading is crucial to reach all students. While the use of meaningful literature will enhance both motivation and sensitivity to different genres and purposes of written communication, a focus on code will help children internalize the code to gain accurate and automatic access to these meanings.*

Schools need a balanced approach to reading that combines (a) systematic and formative approaches to early reading instruction with (b) a literature rich environment that provides texts that are meaningful to children. The assessment of classroom practices (the survey and discussion process outlined above), provides a baseline of information about the school's early reading and literacy program. Using these results consider:

- What philosophical approach to balancing decoding and literature-rich instruction should be used in the school?
- What key features of the systematic and literature-rich aspects of the desired balanced approach are not being used frequently enough to bring balance to the

classroom? Developing these features represents a challenge!

- What key features of the systematic and literature-rich approach are currently being used? These features are strengths on which to build!
- What are the key features of a balanced approach that are needed in the school? In each grade level?

Thinking through these questions will provide insight into the strengths of the current early reading and literacy program, as well as how the program might be strengthened. This list that can be used as an input to the design of an intervention strategy.

Step 3: Focus on Underlying Development of Children

- *Criterion 3: While language, reading, and literacy acquisition are not neatly linear, some skills and awarenesses precede others. For example, phonics training will be lost on children who lack symbolic and phonemic awareness. On the other hand, some aspects of reading must be encouraged all along, such as comprehension and the sense of pleasure and accomplishment that comes with reading. All reading programs must be flexible enough to accommodate the non-linearity of language acquisition while being coherent enough to offer a workable path (or set of paths) for all children to follow.*

While children learn in different ways, there is an underlying process of development that seems to guide the ways skills develop. However, given the diversity of ways that children learn, teaching early reading

Indiana's Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program

The first-year (1997-98) impact study for Indiana's Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program (ELIGP) revealed an interesting pattern. The schools funded through ELIGP added the following professional development features to the typical balanced approach:

- Certified Training
- Certified Specialists
- Collaboration
- Networking

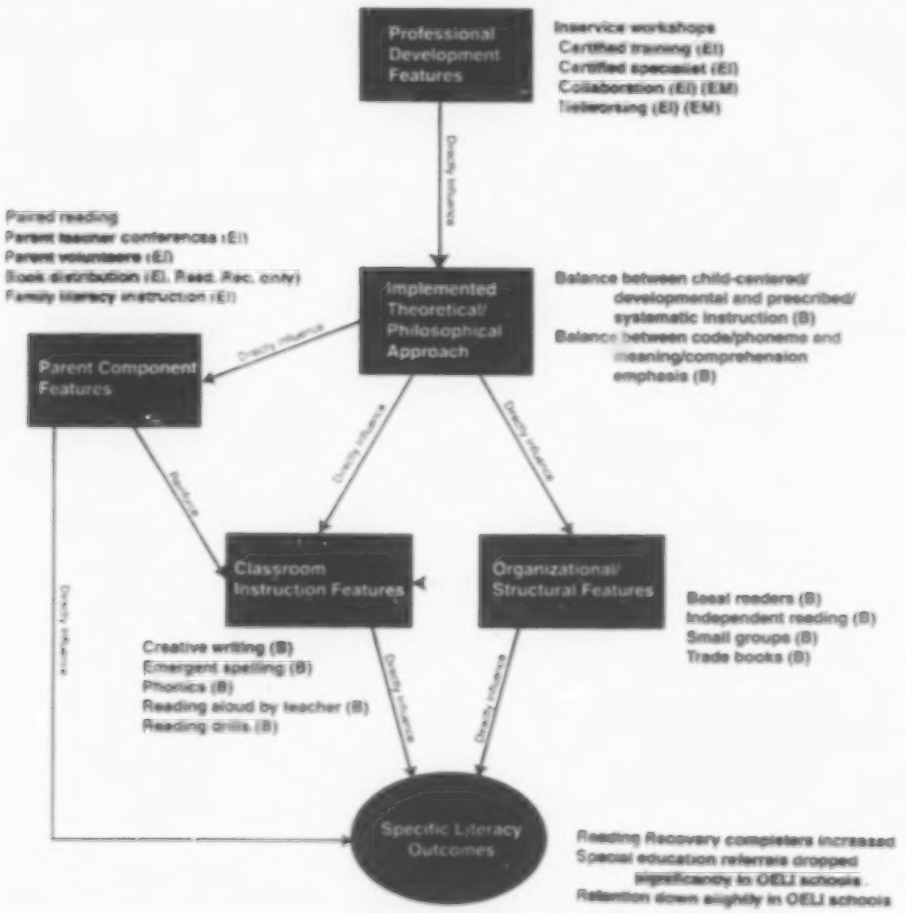
They also added the following parent involvement strategies:

- Parent Volunteers
- Book Distribution
- Family Literacy

By strengthening their professional development opportunities they strengthened their curriculum and instructional processes (the combination of implemented philosophy, classroom instruction, and organization/structural support). Further, this pattern emerged among schools that chose models from those reviewed earlier, along with schools that developed their own intervention approaches.

This combination influenced improvements in the numbers of students served, reductions in special education referrals and reductions in retention (see Figure 15). Both descriptive analyses and regression analyses confirm that the interventions influenced the changes in outcomes. (See Manset, G., St. John, E. P., Simmons, A., Michael, R., Bardzell, J., Hodges, D., Jacob, S., & Gordon, D. *Indiana's Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program: Impact Study for 1997-98*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana Education Policy Center, 1999.)

Figure 15
The Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program [ELIGP] Adds to the Balanced Approach (1997-98 Survey Results)



Key:

B Features marked with a (B) are regularly used in Indiana schools and are a part of Indiana's balanced approach to reading and literacy instruction.

Features and Outcomes that are Highlighted are those that represent program enhancements only in ELIGP schools. There are two categories of these ELIGP-only features.

EI Features marked with (EI) are used significantly more often in ELIGP programs than in comparison schools, though not necessarily enough to be considered common to most ELIGP schools.

EM Features marked with (EM) are used in the majority of ELIGP programs and are *not* used in the majority of comparison schools.

Combinations of markings

Features with both (EI) *and* (EM) denote that ELIGP schools use the feature significantly more than comparison schools *and* the feature is used in the majority of ELIGP schools *and* the feature is not used in the majority of comparison schools.

Features with both (B) and (EI) are those which are used in the majority of both comparison and ELIGP schools *and* are used more commonly in ELIGP schools than it is in comparison schools.

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is not always as simple as laying out a prescriptive set of tests and processes. Before beginning to design an early intervention strategy, it is important to think through the issues that seem to surface each year. Teachers who are involved in early reading and literacy instruction should consider:

- What problems do they encounter each year at the start of the school year?
- What kinds of special learning problems do they frequently encounter during the school year? Are there some parts of the current curriculum that children have difficulty grasping?
- Do they have workable classroom strategies for dealing with differential rates of learning? Do children have ample opportunities to cooperate in the learning process and to learn from sharing with peers?
- Does the sequence of the curriculum work well for most children? When some children have problems learning or seem bored because they are ahead, are there alternative exercises and activities available to address individual learning needs?

Sharing reflections of these questions, along with related questions that surface during the process when discussing the curriculum, should provide insight into how well the flow of the curriculum matches the needs of children in the school. Further collective reflection on the following questions can lead to a set of design parameters:

- Are problems shared by teachers across the school, or do different teachers experience different problems each year?
- Are problems routinely encountered as children move across grade levels, or are there no clear patterns across the early primary grades?
- Are the biggest problems with the curriculum, or do most teachers feel as though enhancement and enrichment are more important concerns?

After teachers reflect together on these questions, they will have a better idea about whether they need to make fundamental, structural changes in the curriculum, or whether more teacher inquiry and reflection is the primary area of need. If, after reflecting on these questions, teachers agree there are shared, school-wide problems, then it makes sense to think about school-wide and classroom-wide intervention strategies. However, if the consensus is that the basic structure is workable, but that each teacher needs to address specific issues, then an inquiry-based approach may be needed (within classrooms, in the school as a whole, or both, depending on the overall approach used).

Step 4: Use a Coherent Intervention Strategy

- *Criterion 4: Features of reading programs need to be organized in such a way as to support each other. Examples of coherence include a program that sends classroom books home with children to read with their parents. In this way, parental involvement supports a classroom activity. Other examples include the use of ongoing professional development to support a theoretically rich program, or the strategic*

use of pullout instruction within a typical classroom-wide program to reach children with reading difficulties. Features, then, are implemented to support and extend the effectiveness of other features.

It is increasingly evident that the various parts of a school's early reading and literacy program must work well together. If one approach is used in a pullout program and another approach is used in the regular classroom, for example, children will find it difficult to relate their learning experience in the one-on-one process to the regular process. While inclusion in special education and school-wide Title I have basic design approaches to overcome this difficulty, even these systematic approaches do not always work well for all children and all teachers. Therefore, as part of their collaborative-design process, teachers should reflect on questions about the cohesiveness of their approach to reading:

- How well do the curriculum and learning activities in pullout and regular classrooms complement and reinforce each other?
- How well do the methods used across the early primary grade levels enhance and reinforce each other?
- How well does the early primary reading and literacy program complement and enhance the learning environments of the upper-primary grades? Do students have the foundations in reading and literacy that they need to read on grade level by the start of the 4th grade? Does the upper-primary curriculum build on the skills of the lower grades or emphasize remedial processes that are redundant?
- Are there professional development opportunities for teachers that help them to identify their own professional challenges and to design strategies to address these challenges?

Reflecting on these and related questions provides a more concrete basis for a design. With this type of information, coupled with the insights from the earlier steps in this design process, teachers and site administrators can reflect on an overall design strategy. Consider:

- Which program features need to be more heavily emphasized in the early primary grades?
- Which approaches to these new programs will build on the current strengths of the school's early reading and literacy program?
- What do individual teachers need to learn to implement these approaches in the schools?
- What outside resources are needed? How can parents and the local community help?
- What types of professional development opportunities will be needed by teachers to make the plan work?

Step 5: Integrate Inquiry into the Intervention

- *Criterion 5: No matter how soundly designed an intervention is, its effectiveness will vary depending on the teachers and children actually participating in it. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that an implemented intervention is working for all children and to identify those aspects of the program that are not as successful as others.*

Inquiry sets up an iterative cycle of careful and critical observation, experimentation of new methods, critical evaluation of these adaptations, and so forth. It is especially vital to identify the children who are struggling and to find ways of supporting their learning and ensuring that they achieve success.

One of the ways to help locally designed interventions work better is to integrate inquiry into the design. This should include focus on the intended outcomes of the intervention and the ways that the intervention is supposed to help children learn better. In addition, classroom inquiry can also enhance the ways individual teachers actually improve their educational practice. Therefore, reading and early literacy interventions need both the big wheels (evaluation of the program) and little wheels (inquiry by teachers in classrooms) of inquiry.

Schools that design their own intervention strategies will need well-defined action plans for implementation, along with well-defined evaluation plans. The implementation plans should include a focus on the professional development of teachers. This may require building in support from teacher educators at a local university. However, if the plans approach the intervention as an inquiry process, they will be better able to maintain a focus on professional development of teachers, as well as on the educational outcomes of students.

Assessing Impact

Not only should schools openly approach the decision process about the selection and design of early literacy interventions, but they should also consider ways of integrating an inquiry-based approach into their strategy for the intervention. We suggest the following ways this might be achieved.

Step 1: Plan for a School-Wide Evaluation

The planning process outlined above also provides a framework for the evaluation of local interventions. Keep in mind, schools should select interventions or design their own interventions with the intent of improving specific educational outcomes. At the outset of the intervention, they should identify the outcomes they hope to improve. At a bare minimum, a school-wide evaluation should consider:

- What educational outcomes were targeted for improvement?
- How was the intervention intended to address improvement? (How were the features included in the intervention related to the outcome?)
- Did teachers receive appropriate and adequate professional development opportunities? (Did they have opportunities to learn about the issues that were of most concern to them?)
- Was the intervention implemented? (Were the intended features implemented in classrooms?)
- Were there changes in the intended educational outcomes?
- How did the intervention influence changes in outcomes?

Ideally a school will have an evaluation plan that addresses these questions built into their intervention. By using a systematic evaluation of this type, educators will be able to test their own assumptions about the ways literacy improvement strategies influence educational outcomes.

Many resources are available on evaluation methods that schools can use to design evaluation plans. This is especially important for schools that develop their own intervention designs. In particular, Roger Farr and Beth Greene's *A Guide for Evaluating a Reading or Language Arts Program* (Indiana Education Policy Center, 1999) provides guidance for developing local evaluations.

Step 2: Integrate Classroom Inquiry

In the review of intervention methods, it was apparent that classroom inquiry offers a pathway into educational improvement and professional development. Indeed, there are good reasons for teachers to think about their own professional development processes. This process might involve:

- Reflecting on the challenges in the classroom (related to educational outcomes and other considerations noted above, as appropriate).
- Reviewing current practices and alternative practices to identify areas on which to focus efforts to improve classroom practices.
- Developing plans for classroom interventions (as classroom experiments).
- Seeking professional development opportunities and other resources, as needed.
- Testing the new approaches in the classroom.
- Assessing the results of the experiments (in relation to intended educational outcomes and personal goals).

Step 3: Use Collective Reflection

If these steps are taken, the school will have set in motion a new, more dynamic change process that includes both school-wide and teacher inquiry. It will be important to encourage reflection among teachers about what they have learned, to relate teacher reflections to the results of school-wide evaluations, and to use both sets of insights in the ongoing planning and professional development processes.

Conclusion

The new wave of research-based reforms in early reading and literacy provides opportunities for educators to learn from proven methods when they plan for and develop site-based interventions. However, making good choices about intervention strategies is not a simple process. It requires assessing the educational needs, assessing the strengths and limitations of the school's early reading and literacy program, and developing an approach that addresses the most critical challenges.

This *Guide* provides a framework that can guide and inform school decisions about early reading and literacy interventions. The review of research-based programs offers a resource for choosing a program, a sound design, and perhaps a solid confirmatory research base. Alternatively, the review can be used as an information base for developing a local intervention strategy.

Appendix A:
Early Reading and Literacy Classroom Survey

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Early Reading and Literacy Classroom Survey

The position(s) of the person(s) completing this survey is (are):

Principal ○ Assistant Principal ○ Teacher ○
Reading Specialist ○ Other (please state) ○ _____

Grade Level:

Pre-K	○	1st	○	3rd	○	5th	○	N/A	○
K	○	2nd	○	4th	○	6th	○		

PART I.

A. Background on Early Primary Reading Programs

Please indicate by checking if your classroom benefited from any of these programs in the following years:

Title of Intervention	School year 2 years prior to current year	School year prior to current year	Current Year (School year just ending)
Reading Recovery	○	○	○
Success for All	○	○	○
Literacy Collaborative (formerly Early Literacy Learning Initiative [ELLI])	○	○	○
Full Day Kindergarten	○	○	○
First Steps	○	○	○
Title I (Reading)	○	○	○
Even Start	○	○	○
Accelerated Schools	○	○	○
Four-Block Method	○	○	○
Literacy Groups (Reading Recovery)	○	○	○
Other Early Literacy Program (please list) _____	○	○	○

2. What is the average amount of time per day spent on reading and literacy instruction in your classroom?

Time per day (in minutes) _____

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PART II.

Instructions: Please fill in the appropriate bubbles to indicate the extent to which the following features were used as part of the early literacy program in your school during the following years.

A. Structural/Organizational Features

Program Feature	Previous Year Extent of Use					Current Year Extent of Use					Description of Feature
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	
1. Ability Grouping	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students assigned to groups based on ability.
2. Basal Readers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Series of graded readers.
3. Child-initiated Learning Centers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Materials kept in central area, allowing children to choose materials that interest them.
4. Independent Reading	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students read silently from materials they choose.
5. One-on-one Tutorial	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Staff provides one-to-one instruction to student.
6. "Pullout" Instruction	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students leave their regular classroom for specialized instruction in another room.
7. Small Groups	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students work together in small groups led by teacher, paraprofessional, or student.
8. Systematic, Formative Evaluation	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students are tested frequently to monitor literacy gains.
9. Trade Books	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Uses literature-based books as the basis for reading instruction.

B. Classroom Instruction

Program Feature	Previous Year Extent of Use					Current Year Extent of Use					Description of Feature
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	
1. Big Books	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Oversized books students read together in class.
2. Cooperative Learning	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students work in groups toward common and/or individual goals.
3. Creative Writing and/or Essays	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students write stories on their own or with some guidance.
4. Drama	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students stage a written selection, interacting with the text in the process.
5. Emergent Spelling	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students encouraged to write before mastering spelling rules.
6. Paired Reading	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Pairs read to each other and are encouraged to help each other.
7. Phonics	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Direct, explicit instruction in sound-letter correspondences.
8. Reading Aloud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Teachers read stories and other texts aloud to their students.
9. Reading Drills	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Directly instructing students on reading sub-skills, using directly-targeted, repetitive, and analytic exercises.
10. Worksheets/ Workbooks	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Students fill out worksheets as part of the reading program.

C. Parent Involvement

Program Feature	Previous Year Extent of Use					Current Year Extent of Use					Description of Feature
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Every day	
1. Book Distribution	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Distributes books to households that may have limited reading materials.
2. Family Literacy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Literacy instruction provided to parents.
3. Paired Reading	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Parents help children with reading.
4. Parent Conferences	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Teachers meet with parents to discuss student progress.
5. Parent Volunteers	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Parents volunteer their time to help directly in instruction.

D. Professional Development

Instructions: Please fill in the appropriate bubbles to indicate whether the following features were used as part of the early literacy program in your classroom during the following years.

Program Feature	Previous Year	Current Year	Description of Feature
1. Certified Training	○	○	Instructors in reading program are *required* to have reading specialist certification or other official affiliation.
2. Certified Specialist	○	○	A certified specialist comes to the school to assist with training of teachers and other participants.
3. In-service Workshops	○	○	Teacher-attended workshop at the school provided by a topical expert.
4. Networking	○	○	Teachers meet with teachers from other schools who are involved in similar literacy approaches.
5. Opportunity for Collaboration	○	○	Teachers have release time for meetings, peer observations, etc.

Part III. Implemented Philosophy

Please indicate on the following scale (See Example) the beliefs that best reflect your school's philosophy towards early literacy instruction for each year, K–3.

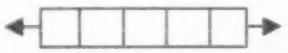
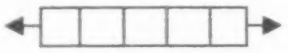
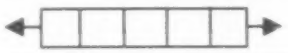
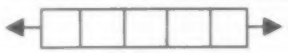
Example: The following would indicate a slightly higher emphasis on teacher directed instruction, compared to student directed instruction.

Teacher Directed ← ☐ ✓ ☐ ☐ ☐ → **Student Directed**

Teacher Directed ← → **Student Directed**		
Teacher actively engaged in direct instruction with students, providing information, selecting topics and materials, as well as setting the pace of instruction, student response and practice.	K ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	Students encouraged to take charge of their own education, to choose from a variety of literacy activities and/or materials, work independently or with peers to create their own interpretations and discover general rules.
	1st ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	2nd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	3rd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	

Child Centered/ Developmental ← → **Prescribed/systematic**		
Curriculum content and pace are determined by the individual child's developmental level and needs, including the child's concepts of grammar and linguistics.	K ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	Curriculum content and pace is pre-determined and based on child's age and/or grade level.
	1st ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	2nd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	3rd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	

Code/Phoneme emphasized ← → **Meaning/Comprehension emphasized**		
Reading instruction focuses primarily on decoding individual word sounds (phonemes) and learning phonological rules.	K ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	Reading instruction focuses primarily on gaining meaning from text rather than on decoding individual sounds (phonemes) and learning phonological rules.
	1st ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	2nd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	
	3rd ← ☐☐☐☐☐ →	

Code/Phonemes most effectively taught *outside of* context		**Code/Phonemes most effectively taught *within* context**
Decoding of individual word sounds (phonemes) and phonological rules are best learned when words are isolated from text (such as sentences or paragraphs).	K  1st  2nd  3rd 	Decoding of individual word sounds (phonemes) and phonological rules are best learned when words are presented within meaningful text (such as sentences or paragraphs).